

# HOME CINEMA

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## Choice



### REVIEWS

LG C8 OLED TV  
Focal 300 Series  
in-wall speakers  
Edifier 2.1  
sub/sat system  
Panasonic 4K  
Blu-ray player  
TCL 55in TV

# SAMSUNG STUNNER!

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Halloween classics for  
your home cinema

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- WALKING DEAD: SEASON 8
- BAD BOYS I & II 4K
- THE DEER HUNTER 4K
- THE UNINVITED
- JACK RYAN: SEASON 1

**INSIDE** BUYER'S GUIDE → READER'S SYSTEM → 20 YEARS OF DIGITAL TV  
→ OPINION → COLLECTING... OLIVER STONE → MANHATTAN PVR → SONOS AMP

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OLED55C8 APRIL 2018

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Model Shown: C8, SK10Y

# HOME CINEMA Choice

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## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Editor** Mark Craven  
mark.craven@homecinemachoice.com  
**Deputy Editor** Anton van Beek  
anton.vanbeek@homecinemachoice.com  
**Art Editor** John Rook

## CONTRIBUTORS

Steve May, John Archer, Tekura Maeva, Jon Thompson,  
Richard Stevenson, Rik Henderson, Steve Withers,  
Ed Selley, Martin Pipe, Daniel Salt  
**Photography** Mike Prior

## ADVERTISING

**Advertising Sales Executive**  
Richard Morris  
Mob: 07834 346461  
E-mail: richard.morris@homecinemachoice.com

## MARKETING AND SUBSCRIPTIONS

UK: New, Renewals and Enquiries  
Tel: 0344 243 9023  
E-mail: help@hcc.secureorder.co.uk  
USA & CANADA:  
Toll Free: 001 866 647 9191  
REST OF WORLD: New, Renewals and Enquiries  
Tel: +44 (0) 1604 828 748  
**BACK ISSUES**  
www.mags-uk.com

## MANAGEMENT TEAM

**Group Editor** Paul Miller, paul.miller@avtechmedia.co.uk  
**Group Sales Manager** Sonia Smart  
**Subscriptions Manager** Kate Hall  
**Chief Executive** Owen Davies

## Published by AVTech Media Ltd

Suite 25, Eden House, Enterprise Way  
Edenbridge, Kent, TN8 6HF  
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From outside the UK: +44 (0) 1689 869 840

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NEXT ISSUE ON SALE: November 1, 2018

IFA show report, p20



# Welcome

The resurrection of analogue audio formats (vinyl, cassette) has been well-documented. The argument, I suppose, is that their digital successors haven't set themselves far enough apart to kick them into touch.



The same can't be said about analogue TV.

It was 20 years ago that the first digital TV services arrived in the UK (see p68) and telly literally hasn't looked the same since.

**More channels, better quality, smarter recording systems...** even the most dedicated retro-head would shudder at the thought of four fuzzy channels with 4:3 pictures.

When the digital switchover was finally completed in 2012, we really should have had a national day of celebration.

Speaking of celebrating, I'm giving a cautious cheer to 8K TV after this year's IFA show (see p20). Cautious because I'm not sure TV buyers need another technology to get their head around right now. But cheered because the sets (especially Samsung's) looked utterly fantastic. 8K might just catch on...

*Mark Craven*  
Editor





# MENU



## CONTRIBUTORS



**John Archer:**  
The experienced TV tester cut his teeth as an early HCC staffer



**Jon Thompson:**  
Film producer and post-production expert delves into Hollywood and AV



**Steve May:**  
HCC's former Ed, is one of the UK's most respected AV journo's



**Martin Pipe:**  
Technical expert Martin is renowned throughout the industry



**Richard Stevenson:**  
Former Editor of the UK CE trade journal ERT



**Ed Selley:**  
Audiophile Ed mixes his home cinema passion with a love of vinyl



**Vincent Teoh:**  
Professional video calibrator writes about technology and tweaking

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# BULLETIN

→ **NEWS HIGHLIGHTS** SONUS FABER 'Affordable high-end' from Italian audio brand  
 SONOS Multiroom giant targets CI market WHARFEDALE D300 Series speakers break cover  
 AT THE 'PLEX This month's cinema releases NEWS X10 The hottest stories in bite-sized chunks  
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## Worth waiting for?

Pioneer UDP-LX500 → [www.pioneer-audiovisual.eu](http://www.pioneer-audiovisual.eu)

After being teased in the Spring, Pioneer's debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player arrives this month with a £1,000 ticket. In addition to 4K HDR playback (including Dolby Vision, but not HDR10+), the UDP-LX500 spins SACD and DVD-Audio platters, with Pure Audio and Direct modes to improve sonic performance over HDMI and stereo analogue output respectively. The deck can also display MaxFALL and MaxCLL metadata values of HDR content, and offers image presets tuned to partnering displays.



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# Just one Sonetto...

Sonus faber Sonetto Collection → [www.absolutesounds.com](http://www.absolutesounds.com)



Sonetto, a new range from Italian brand Sonus faber, hopes to entice home cinema shoppers through its two centre channel options and on-wall unit – in addition to standmount and floorstanding speakers. Designed and manufactured in-house, the

speakers feature Damped Apex Dome tweeter technology, proprietary natural fibre midrange drivers, downfiring bass reflex ports, and 'pristine finishes typical of fine Italian craftsmanship'. Pricing reaches £5,700 (per-pair) for the Sonetto VIII tower.



## Optoma PJ finds its voice



Optoma has launched a 4K PJ with Amazon Alexa voice control.

The UHD51A sells for £1,550, and

supports HDR10 playback. When used in conjunction with an Amazon Alexa device (such as an Echo speaker), the PJ can respond to commands including on/off, input changes, and control over its in-built speakers. Other features of the UHD51A are a 2,400 Lumens rating, PureMotion processing, 10 per cent vertical lens shift and Full HD 3D Blu-ray support. [www.optoma.co.uk](http://www.optoma.co.uk)

## Making a sonic impression



The Impression series of acoustic panels and bass traps from GIK Acoustics is expanding with five new designs, allowing for more

stylistic flexibility when treating your movie room. All offer the same three standard sizes (Square, Narrow and Rectangle) as current Impression panels, and a choice of five different plate finishes. 'We developed the Impression Series to make an audible *and* visual impact,' says the company. Pricing starts from £62.50 per panel. [gikacoustics.co.uk](http://gikacoustics.co.uk)

# Cello intros 55in 4K QLED

UK TV manufacturer also emphasises the speed of its smart platform

British TV manufacturer Cello is launching its first QLED TV, a competitively priced (£800) 55in model. It has also updated its smart TV platform, adopting Android 7 and introducing Cello Play, an alternative to Freeview Play with similar seven-day rollback EPG and integrated catch-up TV services.

The arrival of QLED marks a significant investment by the brand, which manufactures sets in north east England, and is a boost for the Quantum Dot panel technology championed by Samsung.

The Cello QLED is an ultra-thin edge-lit offering with a stainless steel central pedestal and metallic bezel trim. The screen sports a quartet of HDMI 2.0b inputs, along with twin USBs; there's also a MicroSD card slot able to read storage capacities up to 1TB. Unusually, the remote control operates over Wi-Fi (rather than Bluetooth), and drives an onscreen cursor. It can also function like a standard pointer.

## Competitive spirit

Cello confirmed to *HCC* that the television (named C55QLED) does indeed use Samsung QLED glass,



**Brian Palmer:** 'Cello has invested significantly in research. We don't just do me-too products'

but the rest of the set is the work of the British brand. 'We believe this TV is as good as its competition, and it's available for a lot less,'

enthused CEO Brian Palmer.

The onboard Android 7 Nougat platform offers a wide variety of apps, including Netflix, Amazon Prime Video and YouTube, the latter with 4K streaming. Other services include SkyGo, Now TV, VirginGo and BT sports.

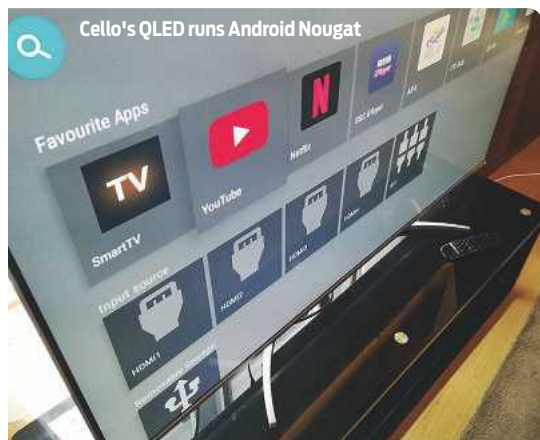
And the company insists its smart OS is the fastest on the market. 'You can launch apps and be watching them in less than 10 seconds,' says Palmer. 'Cello has invested significantly in research. We were the first to have catch-up on TV, iPlayer, and we don't just do me-too products.'

The QLED model introduces Cello's own Smart programme guide, dubbed Cello Play, which promises seamless integration with the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), as well as YouTube, BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All4, My5 and UKTV Play. 'We think TV set-top-boxes and streaming media players could become a thing of the past!' suggests Cello CTO Andy Bodan.

At the heart of the QLED model is a new AMLogic system-on-a-chip. Bodan reveals it is the silicon maker's first dedicated TV chipset, and that there's plenty of scope to do more with the architecture.'

When it comes to HDR, the 4K QLED model is HDR10 compliant, but there's no news about HLG support, although Bodan does say Cello is 'working with the BBC on 4K...'

The speedy Nougat platform isn't exclusive to Cello's QLED display. The brand will also be deploying it across a range of LCD TVs this Autumn, ranging from 24in HD models to a 75in 4K HDR LCD.



## Playlist...

Team *HCC* spins up its disc picks of the month

### Avengers: Infinity War 3D (All-region BD)

While it's a shame this 3D platter doesn't offer the full-frame IMAX footage, the stereoscopic visuals still pack a punch.



### In the Mouth of Madness (Region A BD)



With its new 4K scan and generous set of extras, Shout Factory's Collector's Edition US Blu-ray of this '90s horror is worth an import.

### Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (UHD Blu-ray)



This action-packed flick's searing highlights and gaudy colour palette look totally bodacious in 4K HDR.

### Who Killed Teddy Bear (Region B BD)



An unexpected but very welcome hi-def outing for this obscure 1965 psychological thriller.

### Schlock (Region B BD)



John Landis' micro-budget debut brushes up surprisingly well on BD thanks to a new 4K restoration.

## At the 'plex...

Heading out to see a flick?  
Catch these this month

### Bad Times at the El Royale



**October 12:** Seven strangers meet at a rundown hotel with a dark past in this twisty new flick from writer-director Drew Goddard. Here's hoping that *Bad Times...* can do for thrillers what Goddard's script for *The Cabin in the Woods* did for the horror genre.

### Halloween



**October 19:** The latest instalment in the franchise goes back to basics, ignoring everything apart from John Carpenter's 1978 original and once again pitting Michael Myers against Jamie Lee Curtis's Laurie Strode.

### Bohemian Rhapsody

**October 24:** *Mr. Robot*'s Rami Malek stars as Freddie Mercury in this Queen biopic, which started shooting under director Bryan Singer, only for him to be fired and replaced by Dexter Fletcher.

# Sonos expands in 2019

Multiroom giant preps new amp and eyes up in-ceiling/in-wall market

Sonos will shake up its product line early next year with a follow up Sonos Amp, plus in-ceiling, in-wall and outdoor models produced in association with architectural speaker brand Sonance. Both

**announcements can be seen as the multiroom trend-setter seeking to better integrate itself in the growing custom install market.**

The all-new Sonos Amp (replacing the previous Connect:Amp) will launch globally in February 2019, but US and Canadian installers will get first dibs from December this year. Priced at £600, it claims to more than double the power of its forebear, upping its rating from 55W per channel to 125W per channel (as before, Sonos suggests the stereo unit can run four speakers in parallel, but only recommends doing this if they are rated at 8 Ohms).

Despite this uplift in punch, Sonos has slimmed down the dimensions to deliver a black hardware slab that should fit easier on a kit shelf and can now be rack-mounted.

A centralised heatsink and air inlets aim to keep the unit running cool.

Also added to the specification is an HDMI ARC connection, which joins the unit's digital optical audio output. A coaxial digital port is no longer featured.

Support for Apple's AirPlay2 wireless transmission protocol is also included, and the unit



is Alexa voice control-ready if paired with Alexa-toting Sonos models such as the One or Beam.

For installers, the US brand says platform updates and new APIs (Application Programming Interfaces) will make it

easier to integrate the Amp into smart home setups, 'including smart lighting and centralised control systems.' Says Sonos CEO Patrick Spence: 'We've listened to custom installers and dealers to create Amp, a versatile product designed to be at the centre of the smart home sound experience.'

## While you wait...

Details about the Sonos/Sonance partnership are much sketchier, with the company so far only confirming an 'early 2019' launch for as-yet unspecified (and unpriced) install-friendly products. Three architectural speakers – in-wall, in-ceiling and outdoor – are promised, and will 'gain additional functionality through software' when paired with

the new Sonos Amp. The speakers will also work with Sonos' app-based Trueplay calibration platform.

The new models will join the One, Play:1, Play:3 and Play:5 speakers, Beam and Playbar soundbars, Playbase soundbase and Sonos Sub in the brand's multiroom range.

**The Sonos lineup will add in-ceiling units next year**



# Wharfedale's great expectations

D300 Series borrows from Diamond range, hits a tempting price point

**Wharfedale claims its latest speaker range 'bursts preconceptions' of the performance possible from affordable models.**

The D300 Series is not part of the company's long-running Diamond range (which is currently represented by the Diamond 11 Series) but shares similar technologies and value for money ethos.

The new speakers are the D310 (£160 per pair) and D320 (£200 per pair) standmounts, the D330 floorstander (£500 per pair), and D300C centre channel (£180 each).

For the bass and midbass drivers, the D300s use the latest generation of Wharfedale's woven

Kevlar cone, with foamed polyether surrounds.

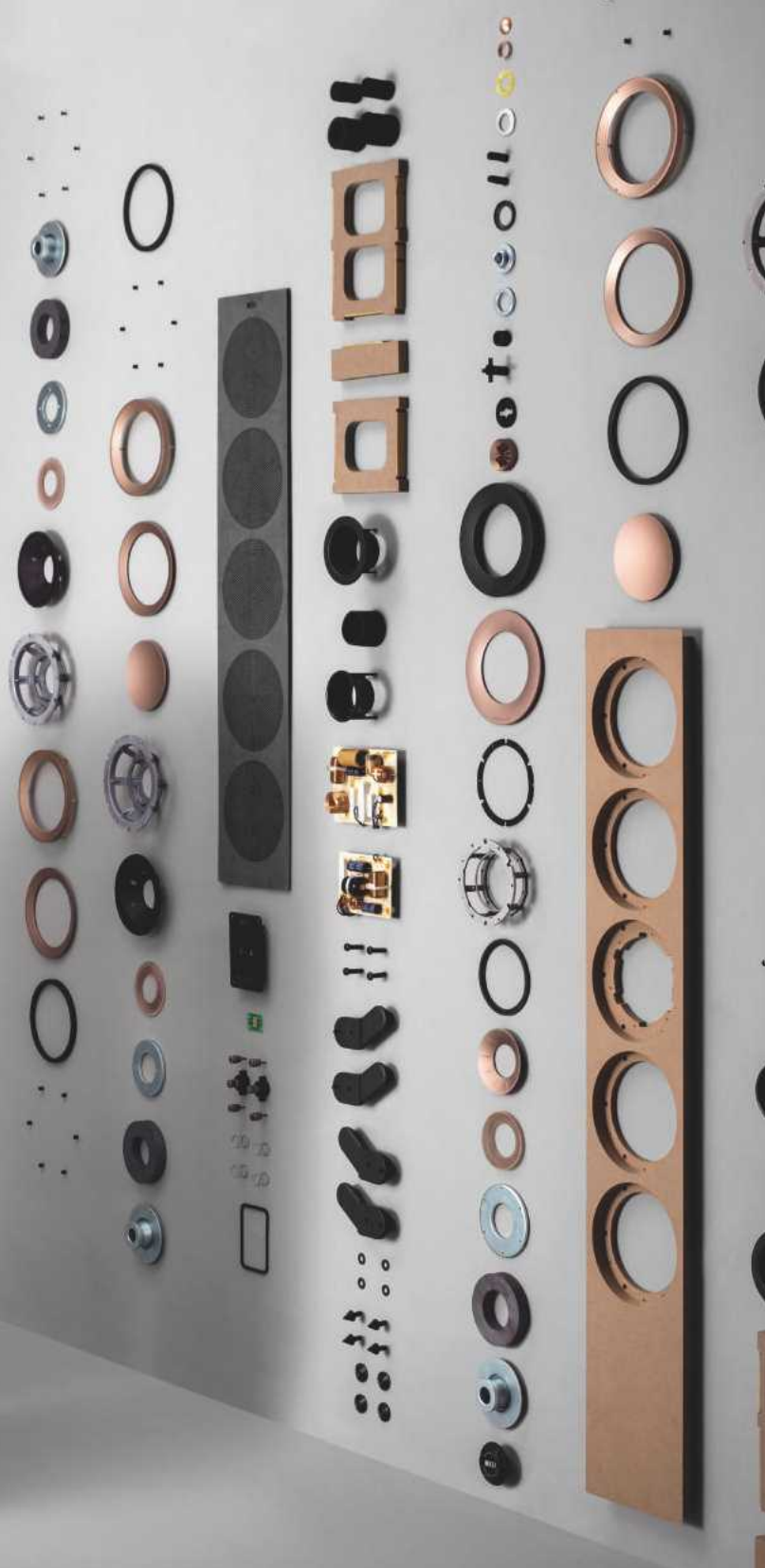
1in Wide Frequency Response (WFR) tweeter units are found on all models. The internally braced cabinets feature 28mm-thick front baffles with profiled edges to reduce diffraction.

Says the brand: 'In terms of sound per pound, the D300 Series is surely Wharfedale's best budget loudspeaker range yet.'

All D300 Series speakers are available in a choice of black, white, walnut and rosewood. [www.wharfedale.co.uk](http://www.wharfedale.co.uk)







## The new R Series. The only thing to remain the same is the name.

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## Extras...

Small items that could make a big impression...

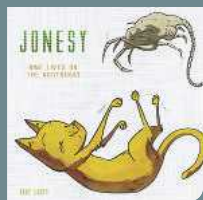
## Scala Cinema 1978-1993



London's infamous Scala Cinema will forever hold a place in the heart of UK film fans – both those

who actually visited and those who only wished they had. This £75 large-format art book from FAB Press has equal appeal to both groups, serving as a stunning gallery of all 178 of the Scala's film programmes and a look at the cinema's history and legacy.

## Jonesy: Nine Lives on the Nostromo



Think you know *Alien* inside and out? Well, with this fully-illustrated

retelling of the story from Jonesy the cat's point-of-view, Rory Lucey manages to give the story a whole new spin and delivers one of the most charming (as well as one of the funniest) movie tie-ins we've ever come across. A delight from start to finish, *Jonesy...* can be yours for just £10.

## LEGO Star Wars: Betrayal at Cloud City



The LEGO Group's latest wallet-busting *Star Wars* set allows fans to recreate their favourite scenes from the climax of *The Empire Strikes Back*. Priced around £300, the epic 2,812-piece set measures roughly 580(w) x 160(h) x 560(d) mm when complete and packs in 18 minifigures, plus two droids and two vehicles – Boba Fett's Slave I and a Twin-Pod Cloud Car.

## INTERVIEW

## Waxing lyrical

Producer **M.J. McMahon** reveals the design decisions behind the BFI's eye-catching new limited edition Blu-ray boxset of the documentary about Mo'Wax recording label founder James Lavelle...

Where did the desire come from to do something special with the packaging for the Blu-ray release of *The Man from Mo'Wax*?

We wanted to do something inspired by the Mo'Wax style, mentality and how it pushed the boundaries of packaging design. In a digital world the bar has really been raised on physical product; it has to warrant the shelf space and it has to be beautiful and have a high-quality feel.

We looked at various samples and all of us fell in love with the same design. It was a package used for a Steven Spielberg boxset and it's also the shape of a 7in single, which director Matthew Jones and I loved. And if it's good enough for Spielberg then it should be good enough for any filmmaker.

It was also very important that the design directly connected with everything else we were working on around the film. There needed to be a clear lineage between the Limited Edition Blu-ray boxset, the HMV-exclusive Psy-Fi DVD, art prints, the double LP and the CD soundtrack. So if someone really loves the film, having the full set of products is a beautiful collective thing. Every detail has been considered, from the typography and design of the titles and motion graphics in the actual film, connecting right across the board with the teaser, trailers, posters, art prints and so on.

## You've carried over design elements from the Mo'Wax album sleeves onto the Blu-ray packaging. Was that deemed important?

Extremely important. We wanted the artwork to be presented full page and uninterrupted by excessive text – like mini art prints in a way – to celebrate the history of the label. The Mo'Wax look was about giving its audience these small pieces of art and minimalism. This boxset is an extension of that.

## Ken Taylor is an artist HCC readers may be most familiar with for his Mondo movie posters. What led to you working with him on this release?

We wanted to bring together the musicians who appear in the film for the main poster. We explored doing this photographically, but

thought that it would just end up looking like 90 per cent of modern movie posters.

We wanted something contemporary and modern, and Ken Taylor's illustrations work on several levels. First, gig posters are a big thing in the music industry and Ken has done similar work for bands like Queens of the Stone Age, PJ Harvey and Metallica. Secondly, James Lavelle references *Blade Runner* and *Star Wars* a lot on the first Unkle album *Psyence Fiction*; both those films have a renowned heritage of illustrated posters by artists like Drew Struzan. Finally, Ken Taylor is one of the best illustrators on the planet, doing work via the Mondo US boutique film merchandise label. So this combination of reasons was why we went for Ken. He's also a big Mo'Wax/DJ Shadow fan, so that helped as well!

## What were the biggest hurdles you faced in putting the boxset together?

Usually a home video release comes three months after theatrical, so filmmakers have more time to prep extras. We're coming out just three weeks after our theatrical run, so that meant we had to produce all these extras at the same time as working on the theatrical release.

To complete six hours of boxset bonus features, art direct the BFI Blu-ray book and the HMV DVD sleeve designs, whilst simultaneously producing the promos and designing posters for the main release was high-pressure, but I think our team at Capture has pulled it off on a scale and quality that I've not really seen before for a documentary, especially given the time and cost constraints we were under.

One last-minute spanner in the works was that we'd planned to have the Limited Edition numbers on the slip case spine. But just when we were about

to press go, the printer had difficulty printing the number on the spine. We then had to quickly reconfigure the design and move the number to the back of the slip case under the words 'Limited Edition'. I actually feel it's now in a much better position!

## The boxset is an extension of the Mo'Wax design ethos



The BFI's *The Man from Mo'Wax Limited Edition* three-disc Blu-ray/DVD boxset is out now and reviewed on p98.



## This month's top 10 news stories in handy, bite-sized chunks...



**1 Catching up with Loewe**  
Loewe has announced it will be bringing Freeview Play to selected televisions via a software update set for release in the very near future. The subscription-free hybrid live/catch-up TV platform will be available on Loewe's Bild 3, Bild 4, Bild 5, Bild 7 and Bild 9 ranges (all models with chassis SL4) and will allow users access to 70 digital and 15 HD channels, plus the ability to scroll back through the TV guide to view shows from the past seven days.

**2 Here they go again**  
Get ready for more Abba sing-alongs when box office sensation *Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* hits DVD, Blu-ray and 4K disc on November 28. You can now start counting down the days until you can hear Pierce Brosnan murder *Knowing Me, Knowing You* in Dolby Atmos.

**3 Broadcasters play swapsies**  
Sky and Channel 4 have entered into a new partnership that will see selected series from the latter (including those under the Walter Presents banner) be released on Sky and Now TV platforms as boxsets. In exchange, Channel 4 has landed the live rights to the 2019 Formula 1 British Grand Prix and highlights for the other 2019 F1 races, plus the terrestrial broadcast rights to the hit Sky original drama *Tin Star*.

**4 Virgin launches 4K channel**  
Virgin Media has launched the UK's first dedicated 4K Ultra HD entertainment TV channel. Available to users of its V6 set-top box 'at no extra cost', the channel offers a mix of concerts, documentaries and scripted dramas (including *House of Cards* and *Masters of Sex*).

**5 They think it's all... over?**  
The BBC claims it has solved the 'streaming lag' that resulted in those viewing live FIFA World Cup matches on iPlayer over the Summer hearing neighbours cheering goals that they hadn't yet seen yet due to a slight delay. However, it also says that the technology isn't ready to be rolled out yet, but could be in place by the 2022 World Cup.

**6 A trio of standard scares**  
Following successful Limited Edition runs, Second Sight is re-releasing a trio of horror favourites as standard Blu-rays in the build up to Halloween. The standard edition of *The Amityville Horror* hits the streets on October 15, followed by *Xtro* on October 22 and *The Changeling* on October 29. In each case the BD itself is identical to the one found in the Limited Edition release.

**7 A real superhero Blockbuster**  
As part of its promotion for the home entertainment release of *Deadpool 2* (see p94), Fox UK brought a branch of Blockbuster in London's Bethnal Green back to life. The store was open for two days in mid-September and gave away 1,989 limited edition VHS cases containing download codes for *Deadpool 2* to anybody who turned up with their original Blockbuster membership card.

**8 UHD action classics**  
Following on from *The Deer Hunter* and *Escape from New York*, Studiocanal has revealed that it is overseeing brand-new 4K restorations of the Sylvester Stallone action classics *First Blood* and *Cliffhanger* for release on Ultra HD Blu-ray, BD and DVD before the year is out.

**9 Agents of Shield**  
Nvidia has released its 20th software update for its Shield TV media streamer. 'Experience Upgrade' 7.1 adds various tweaks, including 120Hz modes for supported displays, new Android TV keyboard shortcuts and improved 'Share' functions.

**10 3D fans out for Revenge**  
Following an outpouring of complaints online, Universal Studios has admitted that it messed up the recent US 3D Blu-ray release of *Revenge of the Creature*, using a reduced resolution side-by-side AVC stereoscopic encode, rather than a full-resolution frame-packing MVC encode. As such, the studio is implementing a disc replacement program in the US and says those buyers of the faulty platter should contact USHEConsumerRelations@visionmediamgmt.com.



## Premiere...

What's happening in the world of TV and films...

### Big Trouble... getting sequel not remake



A producer on the *Big Trouble in Little China* film being developed for Dwayne Johnson has revealed that the film won't be a remake as feared, but will 'continue the story... continue the universe.' Suddenly it all sounds a lot more interesting.

### Playing at filmmaking

Toy maker Mattel wants some of that sweet, sweet movie money and is setting up its own feature film division (Mattel Movies) to that end. *Barbie* and *Masters of the Universe* films will no doubt play a key part of any future plans, as Sony Pictures has reportedly let its rights to the properties expire.

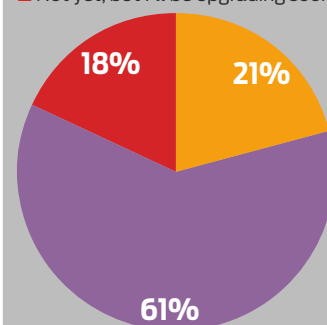
### Back to the Academy?

It looks like a new *Police Academy* film is in the works. Responding to an enquiry from a fan on Twitter about the future of the franchise, Steve Guttenberg replied: 'The next *Police Academy* is coming, no details yet, but it is in a gift bag being readied!'

## We asked...

### Does your home cinema setup support Dolby Vision?

- Yes
- No
- Not yet, but I'll be upgrading soon



Results from [www.homecinemachoice.com](http://www.homecinemachoice.com)  
Go online for more polling action



# A dino-mite sequel?

Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom → Universal Pictures → DVD/Blu-ray/3D Blu-ray/UHD Blu-ray

Having taken a huge bite out of the Summer box office, the fifth film in the *Jurassic Park* franchise makes its UK disc debut on November 6. Helmed by J.A. Bayona, *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* leaves the park behind and ventures into a new world of spectacular dinosaur action and horror, and is set to come roaring to life on your home cinema setup with a DTS:X soundtrack on the Blu-ray, 3D and 4K platters. Extras include 13 *Making of...* featurettes and actor Chris Pratt's video journals.





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## Face to Face

Topics of discussion on the HCC Facebook page

### On StudioCanal's John Carpenter 4K Blu-rays



For someone that hates new art over original posters, they are kinda cool.

Mike Wadkins

Looking forward to *The Fog* on 4K. Where's *The Thing* though?

Barrie Head

I have come here to chew bubblegum and kick ass. And I'm all out of bubblegum...

Ian Brown

### What you're watching on your home cinema...



Just finished *Pacific Rim Uprising*. Atmos was pretty good in this one.

Mike Dix

*Ozark: Season 2*, ten episodes back to back.

Lesley Fernandez

Just watched the first two episodes of *Jack Ryan* on Amazon Prime, very promising.

Alex Russell

Tonight I'm watching *The Killer Must Kill Again* and *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage*, in honour of Luigi Cozzi and Dario Argento's birthdays.

The Killer

Tried to watch *Valerian...* in 4K but it was just so lifeless compared to the 3D version! Put *Jumper 3D* on instead.

Theo Coetzee



*Space Truckers* on Blu-ray, won from your competition.

Mark Barham

Gonna put the wife and kids through the heartache of *Avengers: Infinity War*.

Ross MacLean

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# Back of the 'net

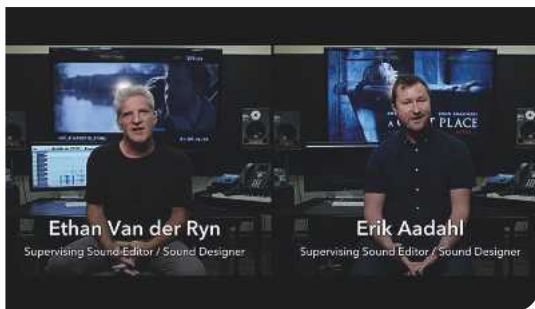
Trailers, technology and more to check out on the web



## Walking on the moon

Ryan Gosling stars as Neil Armstrong in *First Man*, a dramatic retelling of the 1969 Apollo 11 moon landing. Oscar-winner Damien Chazelle (*La La Land*, *Whiplash*) helms the action, with IMAX cameras used for the lunar sequences. Blasts off in UK cinemas this month.

[youtu.be/ME0tvhZ2-m0s](https://youtu.be/ME0tvhZ2-m0s)



## Sound idea

This 12-minute feature from YouTube channel Lessons from the Screenplay explores the sound design of (and contains spoilers for) 2018 smash hit *A Quiet Place*. Nicely detailed, and champions the idea of considering audio as an important part of a movie, and not just an afterthought.

[youtu.be/T-s81-Wl2v0](https://youtu.be/T-s81-Wl2v0)



## Resident hardwoman

We can remember when Arnie and Sly Stallone used to battle it out to be cinema's most deadly star, but a new survey by TV channel Movies4Men has declared that Milla Jovovich leads the way with 1,296 screen 'kills'. We imagine most of them are zombies from the *Resident Evil* franchise...

[bit.ly/2Palus5](https://bit.ly/2Palus5)



## Needle work

As well as launching some high-end AV separates (see p25), Yamaha has expanded its MusicCast product line to include a turntable, bringing old-school vinyl replay into your multiroom system without having to run old-school cabling. The MusicCast VINYL 500 will be priced around £550.

[yamaha.io/2Nu6EiL](https://yamaha.io/2Nu6EiL)



## 'I'm comin' on like a hurricane'

With AC/DC's *Hells Bells* accompanying the trailer, it's clear this incoming horror flick produced by J.J. Abrams (in cinemas from November 9) doesn't take itself too seriously. Which, seeing as it's about WW2 Nazi zombies in occupied France, is probably a good idea.

[youtu.be/USPd0vX2sdc](https://youtu.be/USPd0vX2sdc)



## How many subwoofers?

If you find yourself in Australia from October 12th-14th, a visit to Melbourne's International Hi-Fi Show should be on your agenda, as Aussie brand Krix is promising a 24.10.10 Dolby Atmos demonstration, in conjunction with Trinnov Audio processing and Barco 4K projection. Strewth! [hifishow.com.au](https://hifishow.com.au)



# Driven by design

Sharp by Pininfarina → [www.sharp.co.uk](http://www.sharp.co.uk)



In one of the more unexpected announcements to come out of this year's IFA tech expo (see p20), Sharp revealed it has partnered with legendary Italian sports car design studio Pininfarina on a new premium AV collection. Promising a blend of cutting-edge Japanese technology and iconic Italian style, the first 'Sharp by Pininfarina' products showcased included a trio of televisions, a soundbar and Bluetooth speaker. The range is expected to arrive in shops in the first half of 2019.



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CODE HCC1118P

Samsung, LG, Sharp and even JVC were flying the 8K flag at this year's IFA technology show in Berlin. **Mark Craven, Steve May** and **John Archer** report on all the pixel-pushing hardware – plus more – that grabbed their attention

# SAMSUNG

# 8K touches down at IFA 2018

## Samsung

While tech shows have hosted concept 8K screens for years now, none of these visions of the future have made the leap into consumer-focused products with designs on your living room. Until now.

The headline launch from Samsung was a series of 8K TVs that may have arrived in stores by the time you read this. And they're not going to cost as much as you might have thought, with pricing starting at a likely €5,000 (UK figures were confirmed).

The Q900R 8K lineup features 85in, 82in, 75in and 65in models, and doesn't solely rely on a native 7,680 x 4,320 screen resolution to stand out from the crowd. All sets employ Samsung's proprietary QLED technology, where metal-clad Quantum Dots boost brightness and colour over normal LCD approaches – regarding brightness, the brand claims its 8K TVs can hit 4,000 nits, by far the highest figures ever produced by a consumer TV. This should prove handy with the series' playback of HDR10, HDR10+ and HLG content (Dolby Vision is not supported), and counter the potential of 8K displays to run darker due to the pixel-packed nature of the panel.

Samsung inevitably ran detailed, crisp, clean, bright and colourful footage of native 8K content on Q900Rs on its main IFA stand – as expected, this was highly impressive. Yet behind the scenes it focused on demonstrations of 8K upscaling.

This makes perfect sense given how long it's likely to be before genuine 8K content appears. The outstanding quality of the upscaled results, however, was nothing short of remarkable.

Comparisons of 4K sources with a native 4K TV revealed a huge up-step in texturing and sharpness on the Q900Rs, leaving the 4K rival looking a bit prosaic by comparison.

Even better, the Q900R's database-driven '8K AI Upscaling Engine' did a convincing job of upgrading HD and even grubby, heavily compressed, streamed video sources.

Naturally, such demos are a teaser, and it's only through real-world use can we get a handle on the power of Samsung's processing, but from this showing the Q900Rs appear to have the perfect riposte to anyone who says 8K TVs are a waste of time until there's native content to play on them.

'At Samsung, we've worked tirelessly over the years to move the industry forward when it comes to premium picture quality, and the introduction of our QLED 8K with 8K AI Upscaling is an integral component as we look to the future of displays,' claimed Jongsuk Chu, Samsung's SVP of Visual Display Business.

Look out for a Q900R review soon.



Samsung's 8K TV booth was certainly eye-opening...



8K

## World's First 88" OLED TV



## LG

OLED was the inevitable star of the LG booth at IFA. A spectacular walkthrough canyon of curved displays guided visitors to the first appearance of an 8K OLED panel. This prototype, presented in a mouth-watering 88in screen size, came with little explanatory hyperbole. Asked when, where and how much, LG executives would only say they were 'studying consumer reaction to the screen.' For what it's worth, our reaction was 'want!'

Clearly the panel was a very early prototype, but it didn't appear any the less impressive for that. Demo footage of a city at night looked absolutely

beautiful, with astonishing levels of detail. All the other attributes of OLED, from characteristic pure black to extreme colour vibrancy, aped what we already see on current 4K models.

Unfortunately if you popped into IFA on the first public day hoping to catch a glimpse then you'd have been disappointed. The 8K OLED had vanished, only to be replaced by a current 4K

model. Without fanfare, it was back in place on day two. LG explained it relocated the ground-breaking 4,320p screen backstage for a dealer presentation, which seems an odd decision.

Still, it had another prototype at the show, the Micro LED wall. A counter to Samsung's own modular LED Wall, it was presented in a blacked-out viewing room and was impossible to get near. It offers a 4K display and features dramatic, oversaturated colours. File under 'Work in progress.' >



LG brought 8K OLED, a TV 'canyon' and short-throw 4K PJs



## Sharp

Sharp, a brand that seems reinvigorated after years on the sidelines, put forward a surprisingly in-depth AV range at IFA, with both 8K models and large 4K screens dominating its booth. It even announced a return to the smartphone market.

Of its three 8K sets, in 60in, 70in and 80in sizes, only the larger-size 8T-C80AX1 is currently scheduled for European production, with Asian markets getting first look at the smaller designs. The 80in TV, dubbed a second-generation model as it follows the company's previous LC-70X500 monitor, will come with a newly developed UV2A II LCD panel, capable of extreme brightness, and uses proprietary image upscaling to 8K, where a detection algorithm defines the number of image points and upscales them to match the extra-fine pixel grid of the panel.

On the 4K front, Sharp is launching the 70in LC-70UI9362E and LC-70UI7652E. The former features an edge LED backlight; the latter uses direct LED lighting. They'll be priced at a competitive €1,500 and €1,800 respectively. Joining these are two similar 60-inchers, the edge-lit LC-60UI9362E and direct-lit LC-60UI7652E, priced at €900 and €1,100. All four 4K screens will implement a sound system designed by Harman Kardon.

## 60" 2nd generation 8K HDR



At IFA you're never far from a retro sci-fi display





## JVC

If we had a prize to hand out for best home theatre projector demo, it would probably go to JVC. Last year the company introduced the hyper-expensive DLA-Z1 Blu-Escent laser light model. This year it unveiled a trio of native 4K D-ILA projectors (including its first 8K e-shift model!) that you might actually want to buy, particularly as price tags are kept sensible through the use of traditional lamps rather than laser engines.

The top-of-the-range DLA-NX9 model was on show and looked ridiculously fine. A 100mm, 18-element, all-glass lens ensures sharpness into the extreme corners of the screen, while proprietary techniques reduce light scattering and diffraction for high brightness and deep blacks. Auto Tone Mapping maximises HDR10 content by intelligently adjusting settings based on MaxCLL (Maximum Content Light Level) and MaxFALL (Maximum Frame Average Light Level) mastering information, says JVC. A run through of *Pacific Rim Uprising* on 4K Blu-ray was enough to whet the appetite. Just as we've seen from the brand's 4K e-shifters, 8K e-shift technology doubles the resolution of the projected image by shifting pixels diagonally by 0.5 pixels. The end result is a blisteringly sharp 4,096 x 2,160 picture.

Unsurprisingly, all three models are dark-room projectors. The £19,000 DLA-NX9 is rated at 2,200 Lumens, while the DLA-NX7 (£8,500) and DLA-NX5 (£6,500) are 1,900 and 1,800 Lumens respectively. Native contrast on the DLA-NX9 is cited at 100,000:1, which equates to a Dynamic Contrast Ratio of 1,000,000:1 – an Intelligent lens aperture automatically controls the black level.

What we have here from JVC are the models that many brand enthusiasts hoped they would release last year – native 4K devices that throw the gauntlet down to Sony's SXRD range. They're a major home cinema upgrade, and the DLA-NX9 in particular looks likely to set pulses racing. And the good news? They're available now.



JVC's DLA-NX7 is the brand's new middle-tier 4K model

Hisense's U9D TV and Dolby Atmos soundbar – not set for UK shops



For 2018, JVC has kept its e-shift tech, but given it a serious upgrade...



## Hisense

Up-and-coming Chinese manufacturer Hisense used IFA to showcase a reassuringly sophisticated range of entertainment hardware, from ultra-short-throw 4K projectors and wafer-thin high-brightness screens to a Dolby Atmos soundbar – but precious little of the good stuff is set for the UK.

For instance, the brand gave pride of place to its 75in U9D TV. This slender 4K Quantum Dot display claims over 5,000 local dimming zones and a peak HDR brightness of 2,500 nits, is compatible with both HDR10 and Dolby Vision, and features a stylised integrated soundbar. But don't get too excited; there are currently no plans to bring it to Blighty. Instead the set will most likely make its debut in Australia, where Hisense has carved itself a strong market share.

For the UK, the Hisense TV range is rather more modest. Our advice is to look out for the well priced 50A6100, which is currently being stockpiled for a massive Black Friday promotion.

While the brand seems content to pile screens high and flog them cheap, it is dipping its toes in the high-end projection market. Its 100in Laser TV, the H100LDA, is now available in the UK via Richer Sounds. This £11,000 ultra-short-throw projector is sold with a fixed screen and uses a 'dual-colour X-Fusion' laser light engine. It's HDR compatible, and has a built-in JBL audio system with wireless woofer. It'll soon be joined by 80in and 88in screen iterations, which also shrink the hardware and are said to make less operating noise.

Hisense also previewed its first Dolby Atmos-enabled soundbar, but similarly this isn't UK-bound. Apparently a more 'UK suitable' second-generation version is in the pipeline. Even an OLED TV, lurking off-stand, is something we'll have to wait for, with Hisense saying it will introduce it when it believes it can hit the right (low) price point.





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## Sony

Another IFA show, another 4K projector refresh from Sony, with new entry-level, mid-range and high-end models.

The projectors (all using Sony's long-running SXRD technology) are the €5,000 VPL-VW270ES, the €8,000 VPL-VW570ES, and the €25,000 VPL-VW870ES. The first two in that list replace the VW260ES and VW360ES respectively, while the VW870ES slots above the current VW760ES.

The entry-level and mid-range units introduce previously high-end-only features such as Sony's latest Reality Creation and motion processing systems, a gaming-friendly Input Lag Reduction feature, and support on both HDMI for 18Gbps 4K and HDR playback.

There's also a new HDR Reference picture setting, designed to optimise performance with 1,000-nit HDR masters.

The VW270ES claims 1,500 Lumens of brightness, but no dynamic iris. The VW570ES ups brightness to 1,800 Lumens, and adds a dynamic iris.

The pricey laser-lit VW870ES (which claims to be good for around 20,000 hours of use without the need to change any 'bulbs') features a 10 per cent brightness boost over the VW760ES, and carries a new 'dual dynamic contrast' system that adjusts the laser output and dynamic iris in tandem.

The lens is the same premium-grade version used by Sony's £65,000 VW5000ES PJ.

The models will be available through Sony's projector retailers this October.



This year's show attracted over 1,800 exhibitors and 250,000 visitors

Technics' SL-G700 (top) is the brand's first ever Super Audio CD spinner

## Blu-ray Disc Association

Victor Matsuda, the globe-trotting spokesperson for the Blu-ray Disc Association (BDA), was available for behind-the-scenes briefings at IFA. Naturally, he was eager to report on the success of the Ultra HD BD format – two-and-a-half years since its first titles arrived, it's on an upward curve with year-on-year growth for both hardware and software – and seemingly unimpressed by the swirling 8K stories around the Messe Berlin exhibition centre.

Available UHD titles, he told *HCC*, would reach close to 500 before the end of 2019, with studios balancing new film releases with back-catalogue content, TV shows and regional/local fare. Player price points have dropped so that the entry-level in the US is around \$150. All this is why the BDA believes it can battle streaming services, which offer fragmented libraries and demand broadband speeds for 4K viewing that most consumers don't have.

As a halo organisation for studios and kit makers, the BDA is happy to promote, but less able to expand on detail. Asked when the first HDR10+ title might emerge from Fox or Warner Bros, for instance, Matsuda can't answer. But he is much more open about 8K, telling *HCC* there's nothing in the pipeline around an 8K Blu-ray format, and that the focus of the BDA is simply pushing home the 4K BD message. 'What will people watch on 8K TVs? 4K Blu-rays...'

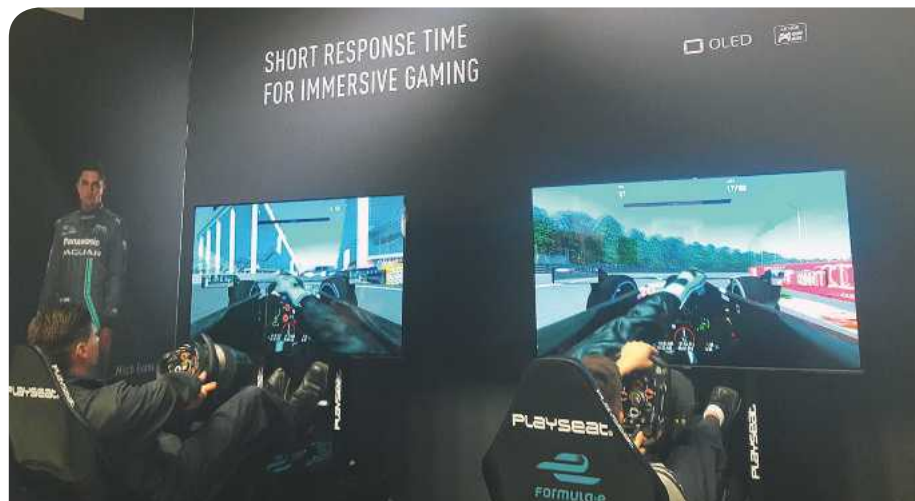


## Technics/Panasonic

Panasonic may have had no new flatscreens to tout at IFA 2018, but it did confirm HDR10+ support for its existing 2018 OLED TVs as well as a selection of UHD LED LCDs. Of the latter, compatibility will be provided from the FX700 model upwards; Panasonic's cheaper FX600 UHD TVs can also read HDR10+ metadata, but have not been officially certified as they do not have appropriate wide colour gamut support for the dynamic HDR standard.

There was much more excitement to be found on stablemate Technics' stand, where the reborn company previewed its first ever Super Audio CD player (late to the party we know, but no less welcome). The new SL-G700 is part of Technics' G-Series (Grand Class) separates family, and is styled accordingly, with heavy-duty faceplate and premium cabinetry.

In addition to spinning SACDs (but not DVD-Audio, in case you were wondering), this network audio player is also MQA compatible. We understand the deck is currently going through final tuning, but apart from that looks ready for a Spring/Summer 2019 introduction.



Panasonic promoted its OLED TVs as gaming-friendly displays



## Yamaha

Lurking on a shelf within Yamaha's expansive IFA booth was the CX-A5200 processor, a new model that replaces the existing CX-A5100. An 11-channel design (with both balanced XLR and unbalanced phono outputs), it can decode Dolby Atmos and DTS:X streams, and passthrough 4K HDR (including Dolby Vision and HLG) via HDMI.

The CX-A5200 carries Yamaha's new Surround:AI processing, which offers real-time DSP optimisation: 'This AI instantaneously analyses scenes by focusing on distinct sound elements such as dialogue,

background music, ambient sounds and sound effects, and automatically optimises [the] surround effect,' says the company.

Joining the processor in early 2019 will be the MX-A5200, an 11-channel amplifier. As an Avenge class model, it sports the usual design principles including a central fifth foot, yet Yamaha is keen to stress its heavyweight construction and attention to detail. Tipping the scales at 26.4kg, it uses 1.6mm steel vibration control plates, and a chassis construction designed to boost rigidity, lower vibration and optimise performance from its 11 x 150W power plant.

## Bits and bobs

The best of the rest from the IFA technology show

### Audio Technica



There are always cost-no-object high-end cans to gawp at during IFA, but Audio Technica's ATH-SR30BT caught our eye

despite a low (£100) price tag. An over-ear design with 40mm drivers and Bluetooth 5.0 transmission, it claims a 70-hour battery life. Or, as a spokesman told HCC: 'Two hours' listening a day for a month.'

### Loewe

Design partner Bodo Sperlein is giving Loewe's Bild 5 OLED TV line a colourful makeover with Himalayan Rosé, Fog Blue and Citrine Yellow editions – although these new hues only feature on the oak stands, and not the whole screen bezel. The company also announced Amazon Alexa compatibility with its range of smart TVs, and an exclusive collaboration with accessories brand Vogel's to create a remote controlled motorised wall-mount.

### Bang & Olufsen



The £2,900 Beosound Edge wireless speaker from B&O shows the Danish marque hasn't lost its appetite for invention. A cylindrical speaker that claims to 'transform the everyday mundane to musical mastery', it offers a new twist on volume control – you simply roll it backwards or forwards to turn it up or down. Lurking within is an 'active' bass port, which opens at high listening levels to change the speaker from a sealed to a ported design.

The CX-A5200 processor (right) joins Yamaha's MusicCast multiroom stable



## Harman Kardon

There was no shortage of smart speakers unveiled at IFA, but possibly the most coherent was the Citation range from Harman Kardon. There's a Citation speaker for virtually any job. From small standalone smart speakers to an entire 5.1 package, these Google Assistants combine a Nordic design (all wraparound Kvadrat wool fabric), with hi-res audio compatibility.

Unveiled at the show was the entry-level £180 Citation One, followed by the £280 Citation 100, step-up £350 Citation 300 and £580 Citation 500. The latter is a mid-sized stereo table-top model that's big on style and volume.

There's also an £800 Citation soundbar with HDMI switching in the range, plus optional wireless subwoofer, and stand-mounted rears. For a more largescale cinema experience, there's the floorstanding Citation Towers (£2,200 per pair), which include integrated 8in woofers. Not a cheap smart speaker system by any means then, but maybe someone will buy you some as a present when they launch pre-Christmas.



## Epson

The projector giant may have launched its debut native 4K projector earlier this year at ISE, but that was a model for the commercial sector – for home AV fans it's continuing with its 4K HDR 'enhancement' ethos, where Full HD optics combine with pixel manipulation to deliver a 4K image.

Unveiled at IFA were new EH-TW9400W, EH-TW9400 and EH-TW7400 models, with Epson claiming contrast and brightness improvements have been made over previous generations. HDR10 compatibility features across the board, with the two 9 Series units also handling HLG. Wireless 4K transmission, via a 4 x HDMI WiHD transmitter, is the bonus feature of the EH-TW9400W.

Helping to make these LCD beamers stand out against the more affordable 4K DLP competition is Epson's usual attention to install flexibility. Focus and zoom are motorised, with the latter reaching 2.1x. Vertical and horizontal lens shift are also offered. And for home cinema completists, Epson is retaining 3D Blu-ray playback – but not bundling any spex ■



# 62 HOME CINEMA HORRORS



Settling down with a fright flick on Halloween is a home cinema tradition – but why stop with just one? **Team HCC** rounds up a selection of classic Hollywood chillers, from comedy horrors to ghastly ghost stories, so you can build your own petrifying playlist...

## SUPERNATURAL SHOCKERS

### The Babadook

'I've never seen a more terrifying film,' said *The Exorcist* director William Friedkin of this 2014 Aussie horror, in which Essie Davis stars as a single mother haunted by both the death of her husband and the monster from her young son's *Mister Babadook* pop-up book. Is a supernatural entity really threatening her family or is she just cracking up under the strain? Spin up the Blu-ray to find out.

### The Blair Witch Project

Some canny internet marketing helped propel this ultra-low-budget 1999 spook-flick toward record breaking success, but it wouldn't have succeeded if it didn't have the substance to back up the hype. Claustrophobic locations, stomach-flipping handheld cinematography and the rising sense of unease that pervades the story (not to mention a well-judged final sequence) ensure *The Blair Witch Project* can still goose your bumps.

### Candyman

Initially dismissed by many (including Philip Glass, who composed the score) as little more than a supernatural slasher, the past quarter of a century has seen this intelligent 1992 adaptation of Clive

*The Blair Witch Project's* shaky-cam scares took the box office by storm in 1999 and still work a treat today



Barker's *The Forbidden* finally receive the praise it deserves for its potent mix of urban folklore, racial politics and ghostly goings on. With a brand-new restoration set to debut on Blu-ray in time for Halloween, we expect it's reputation will only continue to grow.

### The Fog

The spirits of drowned mariners seek revenge on the town that caused their deaths in John Carpenter's campfire ghost story (1980). Filling his widescreen frame with billowing fog, Carpenter never misses a chance to make his audience jump out of their seats, all set to one of his greatest scores. And best of all, *The Fog* is rolling in on UHD Blu-ray this month.







### The Haunting (1963)

This stunning adaptation of Shirley Jackson's novel *The Haunting of Hill House* (soon to be a new Netflix series) keeps its spooks hidden, existing only as offscreen bumps and bangs. In doing so it proves our imaginations are far more fertile ground for frights than any number of whizzy special effects. Don't believe us? Then watch this black-and-white classic followed by Jan de Bont's CGI-heavy 1999 remake and tell us which is scarier.

### The Innocents

Deborah Kerr plays a young governess who becomes convinced that supernatural forces are trying to possess her young charges in Jack Clayton's exceptional 1961 psychological horror. Based on Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*, this artfully constructed Gothic chiller never falters in creating suspense and slow-burning scares, and is underpinned by superb performances that really bring the horror home.

### Ju-On: The Grudge

Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (see right) might be the poster child of the J-Horror movement, but you'd be a fool to write off Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-On: The Grudge* (2002) as just another cash-in. Playing tricks with time and hopping around from victim to victim, this feel less like a conventional narrative and more a compendium of scares, but it's all highly effective – the fate of Misaki Ito's character is particularly hair-raising.

### The Others

Grace (Nicole Kidman) has issues. Her husband is off fighting WW2, her photosensitive young children can't be exposed to natural light, and the two servants she's hired to help around her creaky, fog-shrouded mansion might be up to something. However, in this brilliantly atmospheric and twisty 2001 chiller from Spanish director Alejandro Amenábar, nothing is as it seems...

### The Shining

Stanley Kubrick flitted from genre to genre throughout his five-decade directing career, and made a memorable stop in horror-town with this eerie, hypnotic adaptation of Stephen King's novel in 1980. Jack Nicholson's turn as cabin-fevered writer Jack Torrance sticks in the memory, as does Kubrick's spine-tingling cinematography and the exquisite set design. Probably the most artful ghost story ever made.

### Ring (1998)

The ultimate fright flick for the video age, this Japanese horror hit finds a journalist investigating rumours of a cursed videotape. Genuinely uncanny, utterly relentless (thanks to the curse's seven-day countdown) and boasting a mindbending finale, *Ring* is a modern masterpiece. However, that it's still not available on Blu-ray could well be the biggest shock of all.



Heads you lose with *Ju-On: The Grudge*'s vengeful ghost Kayako

Strong female characters are at the heart of hit shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Penny Dreadful*



## SMALLSCREEN SCREAMS

### Buffy the Vampire Slayer

Joss Whedon took the concept of his earlier movie and turned it into seven seasons of top-quality TV. Sarah Michelle Gellar stars as the eponymous stake-wielder, aided by high school buddies, supernatural pals, and the bloke from the Gold Blend adverts. *Buffy*'s first season establishes the gags and ghouls template, but from there on it grows into something bigger, darker and more complex.

### A Ghost Story for Christmas

Between 1971 and 1978 the BBC set out to celebrate the festive season by scaring the hell out of viewers with an annual adaptation of a classic ghost story (mainly based on M.R. James' short stories, but also including a nerve-shattering version of Dickens' *The Signalman*). The concept was revived in 2005 and the entire run (bar 2013's *The Tractate Middoth*) is available as a BFI DVD boxset.

### Penny Dreadful

This macabre co-production from Sky and Showtime may be best known for bringing together a host of public domain characters from classic Gothic

literature (including Doctors Frankenstein and Jekyll, Dorian Gray and Dracula), but it's greatest success was a creation of its very own. Eva Green's astonishingly raw portrayal of traumatised medium Vanessa Ives provides the story's heart and soul, and also results in some of the show's most gruesome moments.

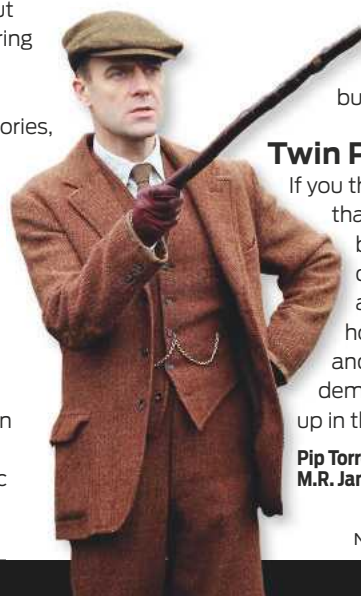
### The Stone Tape

*Quatermass* creator Nigel Kneale penned this chilly 1972 BBC play about a team of scientists exploring a supposedly haunted house. It's a familiar setup, but as usual Kneale gives it a clever twist resulting in a finale that still sends a shiver down our spine whenever we think about it. Available on DVD (including an out-of-print BFI release), but no Blu-ray yet.

### Twin Peaks

If you think *Twin Peaks* was nothing more than a quirky police procedural with backwards talking dwarves and damn fine coffee then you clearly aren't familiar with the flesh-eating hobos, devilish doppelgängers and ghostly inter-dimensional demons that David Lynch conjured up in the recent 'Event Series' revival.

Pip Torrens in BBC's 2005 adaptation of M.R. James' *The View from the Hill*



## SLICE AND DICE

### A Nightmare on Elm Street

Writer/director Wes Craven took the slasher movie premise, added a paranormal touch, and created this 1984 smash-hit, with Robert Englund starring as the serial murderer back from the dead and haunting teenagers' dreams. Inventive and at times surreal, *ANOES* is a cut above much of the competition, although the same can't be said for most of its sequels. Watch all seven flicks in the franchise on Warner's Blu-ray boxset.

### Blood and Black Lace

A masked murderer is bumping off the gorgeous models at a fashion house in this 1964 Italian stalk 'n' slash flick. While the story isn't especially original (it's a fairly standard whodunnit with extra blood and gore), it's the eye-popping style and flair that director Mario Bava brings to the film that not only makes *Blood and Black Lace* so unforgettable, but would also have a huge influence on future *giallo* directors like Dario Argento. Speaking of whom...

### Deep Red

Following the failure of his 1973 comedy *Le cinque giornate* (aka *The Five Days of Milan*), Dario Argento bounced back in 1975 with what many still consider to be the finest *giallo* ever made. A masterful mix of nerve-shredding suspense, shocking violence, audacious plotting and stylish cinematography, *Deep Red* (just like *Blood and Black Lace*) can be enjoyed in all of its beautifully-restored glory on Blu-ray thanks to Arrow Video.

### Friday the 13th Part 2

You know the drill: a bunch of randy teens head to Camp Crystal Lake and get hacked to pieces by Jason Voorhees. So what makes this instalment in the series superior to all the others? In a word: Ginny. Amy Steel's Ginny Field is right up there with the slasher genre's greatest 'Final Girls', her standout moment coming when she puts her psych major studies to use to mess with Jason's head during the film's climactic showdown.

### Halloween

John Carpenter's Steadicam photography, 2.35:1 framing and deliciously spooky score all play a part



in making this 1978 movie the *creme de la creme* of slashers. Plot-wise, it's remarkably streamlined and straightforward, with escaped psycho Michael Myers returning to his childhood home on Halloween, pursued by Dr. Loomis (Donald Pleasance) and eventually thwarted by schoolgirl Laurie Strode (Jamie Lee Curtis). Yet Carpenter's expert direction, measured pacing and eye for a hair-raising jump scare give it classic status.

### Scream

Wes Craven again. Here, aided by a razor-sharp script from debut screenwriter Kevin Williamson, the horror veteran reinvented the slasher genre. *Scream*'s story of film-savvy students stalked by a masked maniac provides plenty of scope for in-jokes, cameos and fan-pleasing references, but while it borders on out-and-out comedy at times, it doesn't forget to rustle up effective scares and a twisty whodunnit climax. Of its three sequels, 2011's *Scream 4* is the most enjoyable.

### StageFright

A group of actors rehearsing a musical about a serial killer find themselves locked in the theatre with a psychopath in this dazzlingly demented 1987 flick from Dario Argento protégé Michele Soavi. Should the idea of watching a killer in an oversized owl mask cut a bloody swathe through the sort of annoying characters who populated the likes of *Fame* and *Flashdance* sound fun, this is the film for you!

### The Texas Chain Saw Massacre

Tobe Hooper's 1974 shocker squeezes a lot out of a low-budget, its handheld 16mm cinematography and location shooting adding another level of queasiness to its random power-tool violence. Famously refused a certificate by the BBFC because they felt even lengthy cuts wouldn't alter its basic tone, *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* didn't actually get its 18 rating until 1999, by which time it had long been lumped together with 'video nasty' tripe. Now you can view it in 4K with Dolby Atmos audio, if you dare.

### The Town that Dreaded Sundown

Based on a series of murders that took place in Texarkana in the 1940s, this atmospheric 1976 film is an odd-yet-effective mix of grisly slasher and true crime documentary. An equally satisfying meta sequel (with the same name) followed in 2014.



Sharp styles and even sharper knives abound in Italian fright flicks *Deep Red* and *StageFright*

From human skin to sackcloth, masks are all the rage with movie maniacs...





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## "IT'S ALIVE!"

### Alien: Covenant

Who would have predicted that Ridley Scott's *Alien* franchise would morph into a mad scientist movie? That's exactly what you get with this 2017 sequel, where Scott finally reveals the origins of the xenomorph and has macabre fun with a doppelgänger 'droid setup. More devoted to churning stomachs than previous movie *Prometheus*, ...*Covenant* ends on a tantalising cliffhanger. We hope Scott gets the greenlight to finish the saga.

### Bride of Frankenstein

This 1935 sequel improves on the original in every way possible. As well as twice as many monsters, it also doubles up on mad scientists with Colin Clive's returning Henry Frankenstein joined by the waspish Dr. Pretorius (Ernest Thesinger). Deeply subversive, slyly satirical and morbidly gruesome, this marvellously queer (in every sense of the word) Gothic horror is the crown jewel in Universal's classic run of monster movies.

### The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari

The quintessential piece of German Expressionist cinema, director Robert Wiene's silent masterpiece tells the story of a crazed hypnotist who uses a somnambulist to commit murders. As intriguing as that setup may sound, what still makes the film so striking almost 100 years after it was released is its dark and twisted production design, which distorts the world of the story to reflect the deranged mental state of its characters.

### Eyes Without a Face

French documentary filmmaker Georges Franju made the leap into the more disreputable world of horror with this 1960 tale of a plastic surgeon who kidnaps and operates on young women in order to provide his disfigured daughter with a new face. While the story is pure exploitation fodder, between the shockingly graphic surgery scenes, Franju's poetic visual style imbues *Eyes Without a Face* with an unforgettable fairy tale-like mystique.

### The Fly (1986)

The David Cronenberg film that best encapsulates his contribution to the 'body-horror' sub-genre, this big-budget remake of a 1958 B-movie lays on



**Get Out** may have scored a Golden Globe nomination for 'Best Comedy or Musical', but at heart it's a real science shocker

a succession of gooey set-pieces as Jeff Goldblum's experiments with teleportation go seriously awry. So far, so schlock, but the film has a tragic love story at its heart ('Brundlefly' is determined to keep his relationship with Geena Davis' journalist buzzing), and proves surprisingly affecting.

### From Beyond

The same people who gave the world *Re-Animator* (below) tackled yet another H.P. Lovecraft story with this 1986 film about a sadistic scientist who invents a machine that allows him to see creatures from other dimensions. Trouble is, it also allows them to see him, and they would like nothing more than to find a way into our world. A grotesquely gloopy '80s horror now available uncut on a stacked Blu-ray.

**Christiane** only has eyes for you (or more precisely, your face) in George Franju's gruesome French horror classic



### Get Out

Jordan Peele's Oscar-winning frightener may be primarily concerned with the thorny subject of racism (in its many forms), but at its core there's some pretty wacky mad science that wouldn't look out of place in a 1960s Roger Corman film. To say any more would spoil things – if you've yet to see it, check out the impressive 4K disc release.

### Island of Lost Souls

Easily the best of the many screen adaptations of H.G. Wells' novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, this 1932 film stars Charles Laughton, Richard Arlen and Kathleen Burke (as 'The Panther Woman' who 'lured men on – only to destroy them'). Incredibly, this was banned in the UK until 1958 and even then was only passed with edits. Today the uncut version is available to buy on Blu-ray with a PG certificate...



**As The Fly** (middle) and **Re-Animator** (bottom) go to show, science never runs smoothly in the horror genre

### Re-Animator

Loosely based on the work of H.P. Lovecraft, this splatterific 1985 sci-fi-horror features Jeffrey Combs as Herbert West, a medical student who creates a reagent capable of re-animating dead tissue. As is the way with such things, it isn't long before the living corpses are on the rampage and a decapitated professor is out to steal West's discovery and claim it as his own.



## DEAD AND LOVING IT

### 28 Days Later

Danny Boyle scored a huge hit with this relatively low-budget 2002 movie that sees the UK devastated by a virus. Lensed using small DV cameras that allowed the crew to quickly set up shots of deserted London streets on an incredibly tight schedule, *28 Days Later* is a white-knuckle ride that transformed the zombie from a shambling corpse to the fast-moving personification of rage. A sequel, *28 Weeks Later*, keeps up the good work.

### City of the Living Dead

A young woman cries tears of blood. A corpse bites the hand of a mortician trying to steal its jewellery. Someone meets a sticky end with an industrial drill. Welcome to Lucio Fulci's nonsensical but hugely atmospheric 1980 gore-fest, where the gates of hell have opened after a priest commits suicide. And with a new 4K restoration hitting Blu-ray, there's never been a better time to pay this *City*... a visit.

### Dawn of the Dead (2004)

First time director Zack Snyder hit the ground running with this remake (and effective update) of George Romero's best-loved zombie sequel (see below). Following Johnny Cash wailing over the title credits, this sets off at a hectic pace and barely catches breath over the next 90-odd minutes, squeezing in an *A-Team* style armoured bus that stars in the movie's most inventive set-piece.

### Dellamorte Dellamore

A late entry in the Italian zombie cycle and a second appearance here for director Michele Soavi, this offbeat and surprisingly steamy film (released in 1994, and also known as *Cemetery Man*) tells the story of a graveyard caretaker (played by Rupert Everett) who spends his nights shooting the dead who rise from the grave. Things get tricky when he falls for a local widow who is killed and returns from the dead again and again...

### George A. Romero's Dead Trilogy

Although his 'Dead' series eventually ran to six films, it's George A. Romero's original trilogy (1968's *Night of the Living Dead*, 1978's *Dawn of the Dead* and 1985's *Day of the Dead*) that stands as the urtext for the entire zombie genre. Loaded with both

No crowds clogging London's streets? Maybe there's an upside to this zombie apocalypse malarkey after all



graphic splatter and astute social commentary, these three films remain horrifying and provocative decades after their original release. All we need now are new restorations of *Dawn...* and *Day...* to go with The Criterion Collection's definitive Blu-ray edition of *Night of the Living Dead*.

### Pontypool

This low-budget 2008 Canadian movie offers a fresh spin on the zombie formula, with the infection that turns people into murderous monsters being spread through language rather than more traditional, physical means. Meanwhile, Stephen McHattie gives a barnstorming central performance as the radio shock jock trying to piece things together from inside his soundproof booth.

### [REC]

Easily the best of the found-footage horrors that followed in the wake of *The Blair Witch Project* (and there have been plenty of duds) this energetic 2007 Spanish shocker makes effective (and for once, believable) use of the format as it follows a TV reporter trapped in an apartment block that has been overrun by the undead.

### Train to Busan

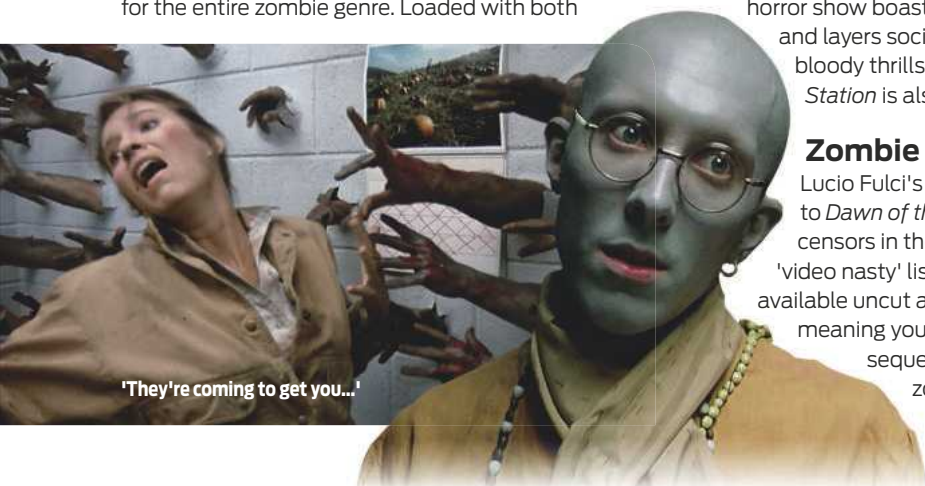
Forget *Snakes on a Plane*, this superior South Korean movie (2016) gives you the undead on a train instead. Like the very best of its kind, this fast-paced horror show boasts a strong emotional centre and layers social commentary on top of its bloody thrills. The animated prequel *Seoul Station* is also well worth a look.

### Zombie Flesh Eaters

Lucio Fulci's unofficial 1979 follow-up to *Dawn of the Dead* got into trouble with censors in the UK and ended up on the 'video nasty' list. These days the film is available uncut and restored on Blu-ray, meaning you can get an eyeful of its sequences of terror and, erm, zombie/shark wrestling whenever you want.



From South Korea to Italy, zombies are a constant feature of the horror genre



'They're coming to get you...'



## BUSTING A GUT

### An American Werewolf in London

The practical FX here (particularly the set-piece transformation sequence) are worth the admission price alone, but John Landis' 1984 lycanthrope classic can also hold its own against any comedy you care to mention. Its story is told through a darkly comic veil, with sprinklings of physical humour on top, and Griffin Dunne's beyond-the-grave reappearance is played to perfection. Even the 'moon'-infested soundtrack choices raise a smile.

### Braindead

Before becoming the blockbuster director of the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* franchises, Peter Jackson was a purveyor of bad taste horror flicks. His first, actually called *Bad Taste*, was followed in 1992 by this gag-filled zombie-thon where the bite from a 'rat-monkey' quickly escalates into one man's (lawnmower-assisted) fight against undead hordes. Low in budget, high in energy, and always hilarious.

### The Cabin in the Woods

Horror films are full of stupid characters making stupid decisions – this wonderfully original 2012 chuckler directed by Drew Goddard and written by Joss Whedon explains why. An essential watch for genre geeks, it's loaded with callbacks to fan-favourite flicks, and a strong cast including Sigourney Weaver and Chris Hemsworth play it deathly straight while the metatextual gags unfurl.

### Evil Dead II

Sam Raimi's hyper-kinetic 1987 sequel to his 1981 debut takes everything that was great about the original and cranks it up to 11. Once again the hapless Ash (Bruce Campbell) finds himself stranded at that cabin in the woods, this time besieged by demons, a dead girlfriend and his own, possessed, severed hand. Given how many times the film has been released on DVD and Blu-ray, we'd be amazed if a 4K platter isn't in the works somewhere...

### The Final Girls

Only released on DVD in the UK (but available on an all-region Blu-ray in the US), this delightful genre homage has several young friends magically transported into the fictional '80s slasher *Camp Bloodbath*. The savvy group soon start to put their movie knowledge to use to try and save lives. But the more they meddle, the more things go hilariously wrong...

### Happy Death Day

This twisted take on *Groundhog Day* revolves around a college student who is murdered on her birthday and has to relive the day over and over again. As grim as this setup sounds, in practice it's smart, very funny and surprisingly good-natured. A sequel is currently in the works.



Ash and friends get ready to slay some more demons in *Evil Dead II* (above)

### Return of the Living Dead

*Alien* writer Dan O'Bannon's tongue-in-cheek pastiche of *Night of the Living Dead* finds a pair of bumbling workers at a medical supply warehouse opening a misplaced military canister containing a gas that raises the dead. A big hit at the box office in 1985, *Return of the Living Dead* is a rip-roaring, punkish zombie flick where jokes are hurled with gleeful abandon. Grab the UK Blu-ray to enjoy the film with its original soundtrack restored in full.



### Shaun of the Dead

This Simon Pegg/Edgar Wright joint from 2004 is both a loving homage to George A Romero's zombie works and a uniquely British take on the genre, where the local pub becomes a refuge from the impending apocalypse. *Shaun...* succeeds as a horror comedy because it's both terrifying and sharp-witted, throwing sight gags and geek culture references into a blood-spattered melting pot. The Blu-ray commentary tracks (there are four!) are fun too.



Horror comedy ranges from the gory gags of *Braindead* (middle) to the meta mania of *The Cabin in the Woods* (bottom)

### Tucker & Dale vs Evil

A gang of college kids head out into the sticks and run into a pair of rough-looking hillbillies. We all know what happens next, don't we? The problem is the kids think they know it too and are certain the well-meaning Tucker and Dale are really out to get them. As misunderstandings pile up so does the bodycount in this side-splitting 2010 spoof that has a real blast upending familiar clichés.

### Theatre of Blood

Genre regular Vincent Price is at his scenery-chewing best in this witty 1973 Brit flick. Price's ham actor sets out to savage the critics who have been savaging his performances through the years, leading to over-the-top death scenes (those poor poodles...) and razor-sharp gags. A terrific movie that deserves a standing ovation.

*Tucker & Dale...* has fun playing with your expectations





## CREATURE FEATURES

### The Burrowers

Pitched somewhere between H.P. Lovecraft and *The Searchers*, writer-director J.T. Petty's 2008 Western monster movie features a posse hunting the hostile natives believed to have kidnapped a family of settlers – only to discover the truth is something far more terrifying. Even when the beasts aren't on screen, there's plenty that shocks in this powerful film, not least the casual brutality and racism doled out to the non-white characters.

### Creature from the Black Lagoon

Not all monsters are evil, some of them are just misunderstood. Case in point: the title star of Universal Studios' legendary 1954 stereoscopic creature-feature. Sure, he may be prone to the odd murderous rampage, but all he really wants is the love of a good woman (ideally, the lovely Julie Adams). Pick it up on Blu-ray and savour the film in its three-dimensional glory.



### The Descent

A movie that'll make you think twice about going spelunking, *The Descent* (2005) casts Shauna MacDonald as the leader of a female caving expedition that comes face to face with subterranean 'crawlers' that use sound to hunt their prey – better keep quiet then. Neil 'Dog Soldiers' Marshall mines a remarkable amount of tension from this B-movie setup.

### The Host (2006)

From King Kong to Godzilla, the most memorable movie monsters are often those that function as living metaphors. Inspired by a real environmental incident in Seoul (involving the US military), it's not hard to figure out what the rampaging giant mutated tadpole monster in Bong Joon-ho's intelligent and exciting South Korean box office sensation represents.

### The Mist

Frank Darabont completed his trio of Stephen King adaptations (following *The Shawshank Redemption* and *The Green Mile*) with this tale of a mysterious mist full of monsters that descends on a small town. While taking its cues from 1950s creature features (the Blu-ray even includes a black-and-white version), *The Mist* goes into far darker territory than those films ever dared, and changes some elements of King's original novella for the better, too.



Spelunking and shopping – both are just as likely to be interrupted by creepy creatures on the bigscreen

## DEVILISH FUN

### Damien: Omen II

Despite director Mike Hodges being replaced part way through the shoot, this 1978 follow-up to Richard Donner's original 1976 Biblical shocker is a more satisfying and complex film. Better yet, it even manages to top *The Omen*'s set-pieces, with a particularly painful elevator ride being the standout scene. Fox's UK original BD box includes all three films charting Damien's rise to power and has the advantage of not including the dire TV movie spin-off *Omen IV: The Awakening* or the remarkably pointless *Omen* remake.



'Demons to some. Angels to others...'

### The Devil Rides Out

Christopher Lee gets to be the good guy for a change in Hammer's rollicking 1968 tale of black magic and the occult. Based on a novel by Dennis Wheatley, the film stars Lee as a suave aristocrat coming to the aid of a friend who's fallen in with a group of devil worshippers. While the film is one of Hammer's finest, Studiocanal's Blu-ray release attracted some controversy thanks to a bit of George Lucas-style digital VFX tinkering.

### The Exorcist

Refused a video certificate in the UK prior to 1999, William Friedkin's head-spinning, pea soup-vomiting 1973 box office behemoth remains the *ne plus ultra* of demonic possession movies. Some of the scares

and effects appear a little creaky today (especially the much ballyhooed 'spider-walk' sequence restored to the extended cut on DVD and Blu-ray), but the film's potent mix of the profane and the spiritual remains powerful, and director William Friedkin wrings fine performances from his cast.

### Hellraiser

A mysterious puzzle box unleashes sadomasochistic demons on anybody who solves it in Clive Barker's audacious 1987 directorial debut. Throwing grisly horror into the middle of a grubby domestic drama, Barker's film has a disturbing darkness that none of its nine follow-ups have ever recaptured (although *Hellbound: Hellraiser II* comes fairly close). You'll pretty much have to sell your soul these days to find a copy of Arrow's sublime limited edition 'Scarlet Box' Blu-ray set.

### Night of the Demon

An American psychologist faces an unspeakable death at the hands of a satanic cult in Jacques Tourneur's 1957 adaptation of M.R. James' *Casting the Runes*. Fan-favourite boutique label Indicator brings this minor masterpiece to UK Blu-ray just in time for Halloween, with a feature-packed set including four different cuts of the film ■



This basement conversion caters to a family with a love of film, music and shooting pool. **Mark Craven** grabs a cue



**IT AIN'T  
OVER YET**

*The Walking  
Dead: Season 8*  
shuffles onto  
Blu-ray p100

# A cinema room of two halves





## KIT CHECKLIST

**M&K SOUND:** 3 x IW300 in-wall (LCR); 2 x S300T Tripole (surrounds); 2 x IW150 (height); 2 x X12 subwoofers

**ARCAM:** AVR850 AV receiver

**JVC:** DLA-X5900 projector (4K HDR compatible)

**FUTURE AUTOMATION:** Custom projector lift

**PROJECTA:** 120in wide projector screen (acoustically transparent)

**OPPO:** UDP-203 Ultra HD Blu-ray player

**SKY:** Sky Q Silver PVR

**CONTROL4:** System control

**A QUICK GAME** of pool? Or a 4K Blu-ray on the bigscreen? The family owners of this basement cinema room can enjoy both in style.

Delivered by Wiltshire installer Aperio Audio Visual for owners Hilary, Clive and their three sons, the system marries a 5.2.2 Dolby Atmos speaker array with largescreen projection and smart control. Lighting and furnishing choices add a level of luxury that complements the premium electronics.

## Come on down!

As the brief demanded space for both an AV setup and pool table/chill-out area, a problem that had to be overcome was installing the JVC DLA-X5900 projector. The 11m length of the basement (it's also 5m wide) precluded far-wall placement, and a permanent installation between the two zones wasn't favoured either, as the owners felt it would have divided the room. The solution was a custom designed drop-down projector lift from specialist company Future Automation, allowing the pricey PJ to be housed safely in the ceiling when not in use.

The JVC model was chosen by Clive and Hilary after demonstrations of various options; a similar process resulted in the selection of M&K Sound speakers and Arcam's AVR850 to provide power and Dolby Atmos/DTS:X processing.

The 5.2.2 setup uses M&K Sound's IW300 in-wall models for left/centre/right channels, fitted behind the 120in projector screen. On-wall S300T Tripole speakers handle flatbed surround channels, while a pair of the brand's smaller in-wall designs

(the IW150s) are fitted for the height channels. LFE comes from twin X12 subs, each one claiming 700W peak amplification.

Add in an Oppo 4K spinner and TV/sport from Sky Q, and the result is a system performance the owners are proud of: 'The picture clarity of the projector is amazing and exceeded expectation, as did the quality of the sound, which is important to us as we're quite a musical family.'

## 'All-absorbing'

It's no surprise to discover TVs in the rest of the house are getting little use now this AV den is up and running – 'going into the basement to watch a film or a TV show is an all-absorbing thing,' explains Clive. Their youngest son likes to settle in to watch his favourite series, while the two eldest make the most of the room on the weekends, hooking up their record decks and inviting friends over to party. That projector lift now makes sense – a pool cue in the lens would be a costly repair... ■

## A. Wall-to-wall visuals

For the fixed-frame acoustically transparent projector screen, a 2.35:1 ratio was specified. It measures 120in wide/132in diagonal

## B. Finishing touch

An integral part of the multizone lighting design is this wraparound LED run in the ceiling pelmet

## C. Sofa so good

The three-sided sofa provides comfortable seating for the whole family – and guests





#### **D. Dark star**

The JVC DLA-X5900 projector (launched in 2017) packs the brand's e-shift 4K upscaling and offers best-in-class black levels for a truly cinematic experience. UHD HDR sources are handled by HDCP 2.2-enabled HDMI inputs

#### **E. Sound cohesion**

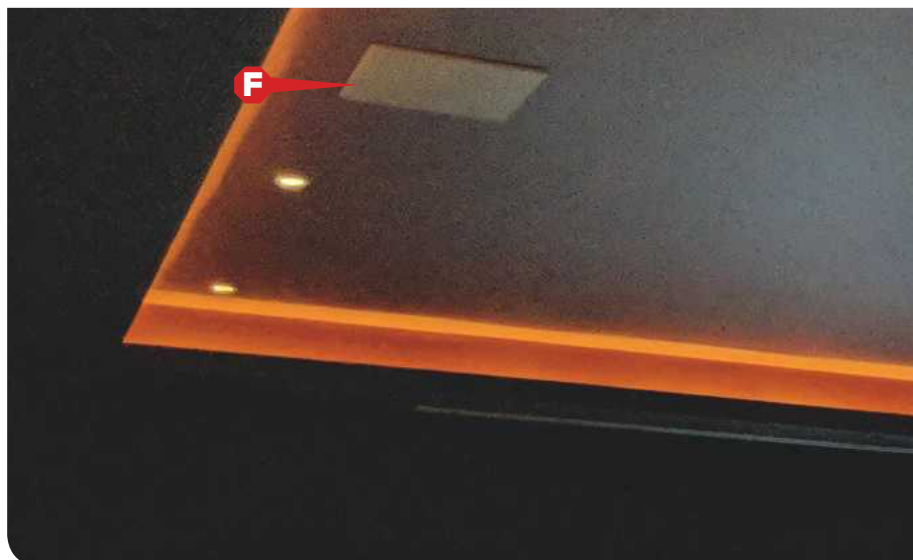
M&K Sound's S300T Tripole speakers use the same tweeter and midrange drivers as the IW300 models fitted for the front soundstage

#### **F. Up above**

The room features twin in-ceiling speakers for the Atmos/DTS:X overhead layer

#### **G. Out of sight**

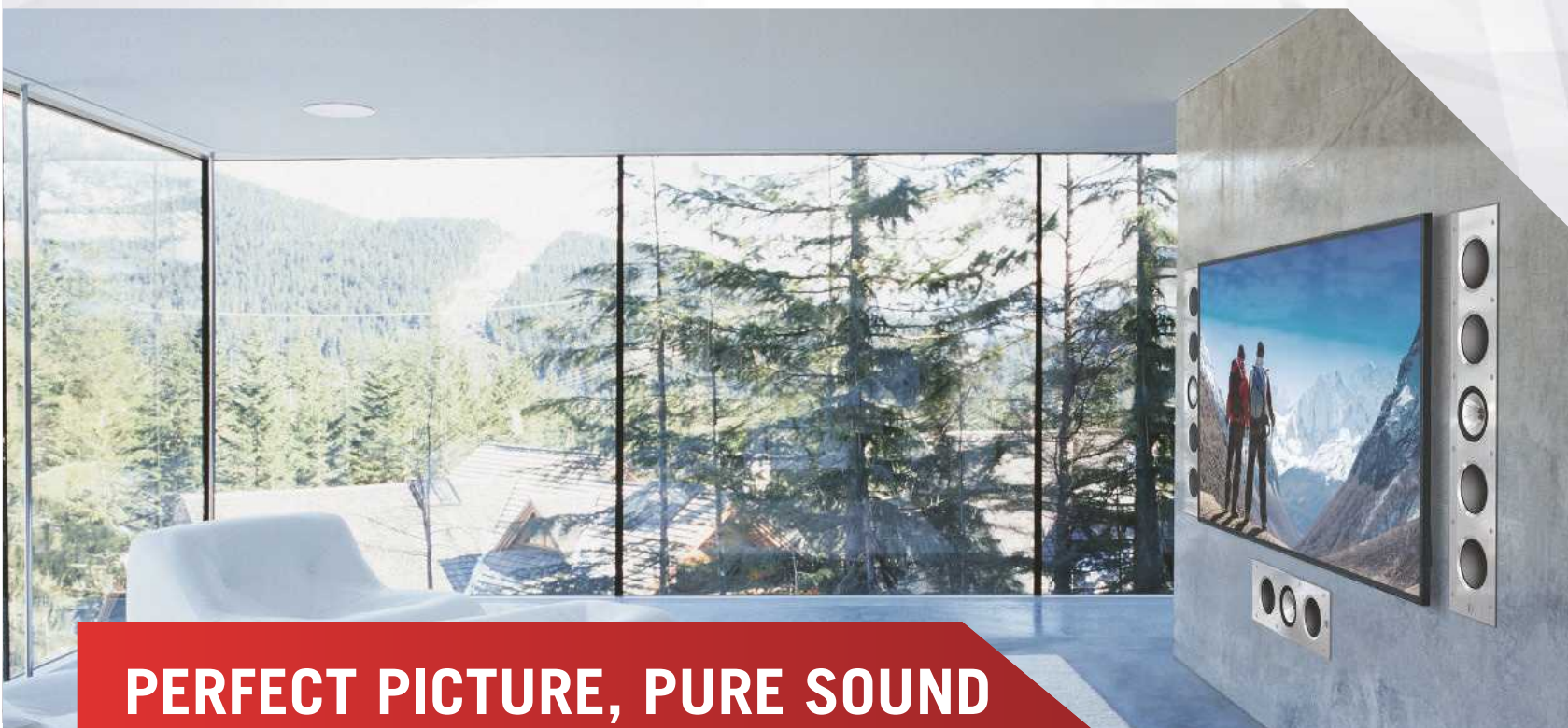
System electronics are housed in a dedicated kit-rack (pictured here midway through installation), with Control 4 processing/remote delivering ease of use







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# Garageland!

Daniel Sait reports on a double garage conversion where plans for a TV room grew into something bigger

## KIT CHECKLIST

**EPSON:** EH-TW9300 projector (4K HDR compatible)

**FUTURE AUTOMATION:** Projector mount

**DISPLAY TECHNOLOGIES:** Frontier screen with 4K/ acoustic material

**ARCAM:** AVR550 AV receiver

**ARTCOUSTIC:** 3 x Spitfire 4-2s; 6 x Target SLs (2 x surrounds; 4 x height); 2 x Spitfire Control2 subs

**CONTROL4:** EA1 processor; SR260 remote

**HD CONNECTIVITY:** 4K extender (to house Sky Q box)

**PIXELGEN:** 15m HDMI kit

**MICROSOFT:** Xbox One S

**ROKU:** Streaming Stick+



Preparing the garage for conversion required both its doors to be removed. The brick support was retained, and remains a visual feature of the finished room







### YORKSHIRE-BASED INSTALLER BESPOKE

Home Cinemas delivered this 5.2.4 Dolby Atmos garage conversion project, although the original plan was something a little less swish – the owner had at first envisaged a self-contained 'guest space' with a TV-based media room. However, explains Bespoke's MD Gifford Malcolm: 'On visiting our showroom he upgraded the spec to a full-blown projection-based cinema.' As you would.

Not that this was to become a typical dark-walled movie den. Much of the garage's design features were retained, including its vaulted ceiling, and a sofa was preferred to traditional cinema recliners, giving it a more 'relaxed' look.

For the AV, a 16:9 ratio screen was chosen as the best canvas for a diet of film, sports and games, working in conjunction with an Epson projector. Artcoustic speakers are powered by an Arcam AVR550 receiver, with the latter's Dirac room calibration helping get over the anomalies caused by the vaulted ceiling. 'It did an amazing job, the difference was day and night,' says Malcolm.

The completed project is now a hit with the entire family, to the extent that the owner's teenage children have to book their own movie nights in advance... ■

#### A. Double bass

With the owner wanting a 'discreet' install, the decision was made to use on-wall subwoofers located behind the PJ screen

#### B. Beam for a beamer

With no existing truss offering an ideal location for the PJ (considering screen size and throw ratio), an additional horizontal beam was fitted

#### C. Go with the glow

The custom panelling on the front wall houses the projector screen and hardware cabinet, and provides space for a subtle lighting design



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# REVIEWS

→ **HARDWARE** ELIPSON Prestige Facet 7.2.4 Dolby Atmos speaker array  
 PHILIPS Affordable 43in 4K HDR TV FOCAL In-wall 300 Series LCR speakers TCL 55in 4K HDR TV  
 PANASONIC SC-HTB258 soundbar system and DP-UB420 Ultra HD Blu-ray player  
 MANHATTAN Twin-tuner 500GB Freeview HD PVR EDIFIER Active 2.1 speaker system & MORE

## Master of light and dark

Samsung's ultra-bright, direct-lit Q8 QLED panel promises a premium 4K HDR experience. Does it deliver? Turn to p46 to find out...

### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★☆
Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★★☆☆
Dire	★★★☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed

'The fact you can get this towering system for just three-and-a-half grand makes it a bit of a bargain'







**Steve Withers** wires up 13 separate cabinets and settles in for a movie or two with Elipson's Atmos debut

# Audio all around you

You may not be that familiar with French audio brand Elipson, but you'll certainly recognise its most famous speaker. The company's spherical Planets are iconic, if slightly bonkers, but Elipson also makes traditionally shaped speakers, and that includes its Prestige range.

The original Prestige models launched in the 1970s, with the aim of audio fidelity and sonic neutrality. Yet Elipson eventually felt there was room for improvement, and in 2016 it revamped the entire range, overhauling the design to include a reinforced cabinet, double-layered fronts, tweaked crossover filters, and dual binding posts. Central to this new Prestige design are the sculpted facet silicone rings surrounding each tweeter and mid/bass driver. These look like cut diamonds and are designed to reduce baffle-borne diffractions, resulting in a smoother listening experience. This aspect of the design is not only visually distinctive, but important enough to inform the range's name: Prestige Facet.

If you're going to call something 'prestige' you'd better deliver and thankfully Elipson's done a cracking job. The facet rings really stand out, while the curved cabinet edges and meticulous lacquered finish ooze class. There's a choice of three colours – black, white, and a more traditional black/walnut (pictured), and if the facet design isn't to your tastes, you can cover the drivers with black magnetic grilles.

## The full monty

Prestige Facet is composed of floorstanders and compact models, along with subwoofers and specialist home cinema speakers. Although each model is available separately, Elipson also offers various packages, one of which is auditioned here: a full monty 7.2.4-channel system which will set you back £3,500.

The main speakers are the 14F 2.5-way floorstanders (£900 a pair), which are equipped with a 1in soft dome tweeter, a 6.5in woofer, and a 6.5in midbass driver. The latter is fitted with a bullet-shaped phase plug intended to limit vibrations, and all drivers are surrounded by the multifaceted silicone rings. For this speaker Elipson claims an impressive low-frequency response of 38Hz.

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Floorstanding 7.2.4 Dolby Atmos system

**POSITION:** One of Elipson's more traditional ranges, next to the in-wall/on-wall Infinite series

**PEERS:** ELAC Debut; DefTech DP9000; Jamo S800

**1.** The system uses Atmos upfired and dipole surrounds

At the back you'll find dual silver-plated speaker terminals, which offer the possibility of bi-wiring and bi-amping. The speaker is extremely solid, weighing a hefty 20.5kg, and sits on a removable plinth with the option of rubber feet or spikes.

The 14C centre channel model (£400) largely mimics the 14F, with multifaceted rings, a 1in tweeter and brace of 6.5in midbass units. The claimed low-end extension is a decent 43Hz, and the use of the same tweeters and drivers should result in a uniform performance across the front three channels. The 14C sits on a similar plinth stand.

The four 7SR surround speakers (£280 a pair) retain many of the features found on the other models, but use a dipole design with a 5.5in midbass driver mounted in the middle, and out-of-phase 1in tweeters on either side. This results in a dispersed surround soundfield, but low-frequency response rises to a claimed 65Hz. The 7SR is designed to be wall mounted, and unlike the other speakers is only available in black.

The included quartet of 6ATM upward-firing speakers (£350 a pair) were developed in conjunction with Dolby for use with Atmos. The 5.5in midbass driver and 1in tweeter aim at a 15-degree angle toward your ceiling, reflecting back to the listener. The speakers retain many of the other features found in the rest of the range, and have the same low-end extension as the surrounds.

Finally this system uses a pair of Elipson's SUB10 forward-firing subwoofers (£650 each). As the name suggests, they use 10in drivers (married to down-facing bass reflex ports) along with Class D amps claiming 250W of power. The rear panels are uncluttered, but an LFE input, level, phase and crossover controls are all a user is likely to need. The sub sits on a removable plinth, and while the build quality is very good, the supporting silver columns look a bit tacky.

## Take your places

Since the 7SRs are dipoles, you need to position them correctly in order to get the desired effect. Elipson recommends a height of 60cm above the sweet spot and thankfully each speaker is marked Surround Left and Surround Back Right or Surround Right and Surround Back Left, making installation simple.

The Atmos modules also require some careful positioning to create the illusion of overhead audio. That means you need a fairly low, flat and reflective ceiling for

**'Ready Player One's** Cataclyst explosion moves from the front of the room to the rear like a tsunami of sound'

the best results, and for the desired effect you place two speakers at the front and two at the rear.

The locations of the front positions are fairly obvious; you just put them on the 14F floorstanders and they pair up quite nicely. For the rear I'd recommend putting them over the two surround back speakers, but they don't really fit atop the 7SR. This means you'll either need to use a shelf or do what I did and resort to Blu-Tack, which isn't the most attractive solution.

From the perspective of mounting the Atmos speakers, the Prestige Facet 8B standmount (not tested here) might



be a better choice for the surround back channels. If Elipson really wants you to use dipoles at the rear, then I'd suggest a new model with built-in upward-firing drivers.

The sensitivity/impedance figures suggest these speakers won't be a difficult load for the current crop of 11-channel AV receivers. My reference Arcam AVR850 and P429 combo certainly had no trouble, with its Class G amplification delivering plenty of oomph.

## Fist of fury

So, how did the system sound? In a word: amazing. I have always advocated a full 7.2.4 system for those wanting a truly immersive experience and the Prestige Facet package does exactly that.

Despite being delivered via Dolby Digital Plus, the Atmos soundtrack on *Iron Fist* (Netflix) sounds stunning. The first episode of Season Two ends with a scene of Danny Rand practicing his martial arts, and it's the perfect example of the creative use of object-based audio to enhance the visuals.

Danny's down in a basement and you can hear subway trains rumbling overhead thanks to the upward-firing



drivers. The dipole surrounds ensure his breathing echoes around the room, and the front three speakers pick out the higher frequencies as the metal door he's punching buckles. The impacts of his glowing iron fist are given greater weight as the punchy subs fill the room with bass energy.

*Ready Player One* (4K Blu-ray) has become a favourite test disc and has an incredibly frenetic Dolby Atmos soundtrack, designed by the legendary Gary Rydstrom. It's an immersive mix, especially when the action moves to the virtual world of the Oasis.

Elipson's 7.2.4 speaker configuration takes full advantage of this track. During the opening race sequence, cars and other vehicles seamlessly move from front to rear, demonstrating the excellent tonal balance of the system. At one point Parzival is driving under the race track, facilitating plenty of overhead effects that the Elipsons deliver with real precision.

The race ends with the arrival of King Kong (it's that sort of movie...), and the combination of the tangible low-end of the front floorstanders and the excellent bass extension of the subwoofers makes sure the venerable ape's presence is well and truly felt.

The system takes the dynamic swells in the soundmix in its stride. It also copes with the multiple layers of effects; the inherent fidelity and neutrality of the speakers ensuring every carefully positioned sound and object is perfectly delivered, allowing me to pick each one out with genuine clarity.

There's a scene towards the end of the film where a bomb called the Cataclyst is detonated and there's a massive sonic shockwave that moves from the front of the room to the rear like a tsunami of sound. I'm pretty sure every speaker was energised at this point, and the system as a whole seemed in unison, with the subs plumbing the depths of their claimed bass extension.

## Pratting about

The Atmos units might have been co-developed with Dolby, but they work just as well with DTS:X. The fortuitous arrival of *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* on 4K Blu-ray (US import) gave me the chance to put this system through its paces. There's nothing like a dinosaur movie to get the audio juices flowing.

The jungle sequences prove great for testing the Elipson system's ability to create a believable sense of location. All those carefully designed Foley effects are intended to immerse you in an environment, and this 7.2.4 array was so successful at replicating them that I started to sweat and swat mosquitoes.

That same sense of realism also applies to later scenes that take place in a mansion being pummelled by a suitably horrific storm. Thunder cracks overhead and dinosaurs tear their way through the walls and across the roof. The localisation of effects is again precise and dialogue is well defined.

A scene where Chris Pratt's character is stuck in a trailer with a T-Rex gives the twin subwoofers another chance to shine. They deliver real weight to the dino, to the point where you can feel each breath. Then, as the beast attacks, its jaws snap shut in the middle of the room, causing me to duck.

Possibly the standout scene concerns the eruption of a volcano, which feels terrifyingly ferocious. This system crafts an abundance of sub-sonic energy as pyroclastic

## SPECIFICATIONS

### Prestige Facet 14F

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 1in tweeter; 1 x 6.5in midbass driver; 1 x 6.5in woofer  
**ENCLOSURE:** Front-ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 38Hz-25kHz  
**SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 92dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 238(w) x 1,026(h) x 351(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 20.5kg

### Prestige Facet 14C

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 1in tweeter; 2 x 6.5in midbass drivers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 43Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 93dB  
**POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 600(w) x 310(h) x 250(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 15kg

### Prestige Facet 7SR

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 1in tweeters; 1 x 5.5in midbass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Dipole, down-ported  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 65Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 87dB  
**POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 80W **DIMENSIONS:** 380(w) x 220(h) x 170(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 5kg

### Prestige Facet 6ATM

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 1in tweeter; 1 x 5.5in midbass driver **ENCLOSURE:** Dolby Atmos module  
**FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 65Hz-25kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 90dB  
**POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 70W **DIMENSIONS:** 207(w) x 181(h) x 290(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 4.8kg

### Prestige Facet SUB10

**DRIVE UNITS:** 1 x 10in woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Down-ported, front-firing **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 27Hz-150Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 250W Class D amplifier  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 405(w) x 424(h) x 445(d)mm  
**WEIGHT:** 22kg **FEATURES:** Stereo phono line-level input; LFE input; 0-180 phase switch; automatic standby; variable crossover/gain adjustment

## PARTNER WITH



**DENON AVR-X6400H:** Considering it packs 11 amplifier channels, this Denon receiver is well priced at just £1,400. Handles Atmos, DTS:X and even Auro-3D mixes, and boasts a detailed, quick-footed and articulate sound.

clouds tear through the room and lava rains down on me. Yet the over-the-top nature of the scene notwithstanding, the sounds never feel overblown and the speakers are always in control. The plaintive cries of dinosaurs trying to escape are carefully positioned within three-dimensional space, despite the cacophony of effects that abound within the mix.

## Bargain hunt

Elipson's Prestige Facet range offers plenty for system builders, and a sound that's rich in fidelity and neutrality. The clean and thoroughly modern appearance is a major plus point, while the build quality and finish is exceptional. Most importantly, this 7.2.4 package is about as immersive as you can get, with a dynamic and forceful performance that's sure to please. The fact you can get all of this for just three-and-a-half grand makes it a bit of a bargain ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Elipson Prestige Facet 7.2.4

→ £3,500 → [www.elipson.com](http://www.elipson.com)

**WE SAY:** This beautifully made and cleverly designed speaker package is not only great value but fully immerses you in a way that few other systems can.

**2. Elipson's 6ATM Atmos modules are styled to fit the Prestige Facet 14Fs**

**3. The floorstanders offer dual binding posts for bi-amped/bi-wired systems**





**WADE'S  
WORLD**

Deadpool and  
pals have more  
foul-mouthed  
4K frolics p94



Samsung's Q8 QLED TV is another stunning performer – but **John Archer** wishes it was a bit less expensive

# A quantum of solace

Samsung's flagship flatscreen for 2018, the QE65Q9FN, is the best LCD TV I've ever experienced. Its combination of astonishing brightness and the sort of black levels only OLED TVs used to manage make it a dream to watch. The lure of the QE65Q8DN on test here is that it offers much of the Q9FN's core technology for a lower price. Although that price still isn't exactly cheap...

This technology kicks off with Samsung's QLED colour system, which uses Quantum Dots (housed in metal sheaths) to increase the colour volume available. This goes hand in glove with high dynamic range playback, especially when there's more than 2,000 nits of peak brightness to play with...

The QE65Q8DN also employs a direct backlighting system with local dimming. This is now a feature of Samsung's QLED range after it flirted last year with edge LED engines. The aim is to deliver a greater contrast and more even black levels.

Where this model falls short of its top-of-the-range sibling is in the number of individual dimming zones used. On the Q8 there are 40; on the Q9 there are 400. Its ability to effectively manage its light output will therefore be reduced.

This set isn't as bright either, measuring around 300 nits less on a 10 per cent white HDR window. Yet at 2,100 nits, it still remains one of the punchiest displays around.

## Design disconnection

Further differences concern the TV's design. In particular, it uses connections built into its main bodywork rather than an external connections box. The connectivity itself is the same, with four full-bandwidth HDMI inputs, three USBs and built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth. But not using an external box means you can't get away with just a single cable running into the screen.

Channelling in the TV's feet and rear panel help you hide cabling away. These feet are also a change from the QE65Q9FN, which uses a centrally mounted bar-style stand. Switching to twin feet means you need a fairly wide bit of furniture.

The QE65Q8DN retains Samsung's Ambient Mode, which can run a digital artwork or photograph onscreen

at low power when you're not watching it, rather than just presenting a big black rectangle to the world.

Other smart features come courtesy of the second generation of Samsung's home-grown Eden platform, which is a slick, compact, easy-to-customise system that combines effectively with intuitive and wide-ranging voice control.

## I've been expecting you

This Samsung performs almost exactly as I'd imagined it would from its specification differences with the Q9FN. Which is mostly a very good thing.

Its contrast is outstanding, with SDR and HDR content alike. Its impact is at its most dramatic with HDR's much wider light range. During the night-time fight between Thor, Captain America and Iron Man in *Avengers: Assemble* on 4K Blu-ray, black levels are deep to a degree you might not expect from LCD technology.

Bright parts of this sequence, such as Iron Man's power source and Thor's lightning, look wonderfully intense. Delivering such extremes of light on screen simultaneously makes you 'get' what HDR is all about (note that the Q8DN doesn't support the Dolby Vision format – just HDR10, HLG and HDR10+).

The picture doesn't just deal in extremes of light, either. In fact, there's slightly more visible shadow detail in the darkest parts of the image here than I experienced with the step-up Q9FN (which occasionally loses some of the darkest details on its way to delivering the inkiest black levels in the LCD TV arena).

The TV is also an excellent colour performer. It handles the wide colour gamuts of the various superhero outfits on the *Avengers: Assemble* 4K Blu-ray with spectacular lustre and authority, marrying ultra-rich saturations with subtle variation. And thanks to Samsung's QLED technology, ➤

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
65in LCD TV with direct lighting, local dimming and QLED Quantum Dots

**POSITION:**  
Below the flagship Q9FN in Samsung's 4K range

**PEERS:**  
Samsung QE65Q9FN; Sony KD-65ZD9

**1. Direct-lit like the Q9FN, but with fewer local dimming zones**

**2. Samsung's 'One Remote' is joined by another, more traditional, zapper**





## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; HDR10+ **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; Freesat HD **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB ports; optical digital audio output; RF input; Ethernet port **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 40W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 1,500 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,450(w) x 830(h) x 58.7(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 26.5kg

**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; multimedia playback; Q Engine video processor; Samsung QLED Quantum Dot technology; voice control; Eden 2.0 smart system; direct backlighting with local dimming

## PARTNER WITH



### SAMSUNG HW-MS650:

Launched last year at around £600, but now available for £350, this soundbar musters a fine bass delivery despite not shipping with a subwoofer, and unearths film and music subtleties with ease. Slick app control too.

3

colours also look fulsomely saturated; there's none of that washed-out, thin look to tones seen with screens that push their luminance further than their colour range can support.

## Sharp shooter

The QE65Q8DN's pictures look spectacularly sharp and detailed with native 4K content. The extra refinement the *Avengers: Assemble* UHD disc gives you over the HD version is delivered beautifully, and hits home right across the 65in canvas.

This sharpness doesn't look forced. There's no sense of excessive grittiness in the picture, or of harsh edges appearing exaggerated or ghosted. You can push the set's sharpness adjustment if you wish; my advice is to go no higher than its 40 setting.

**'An excellent colour performer – the Avengers' outfits are delivered with lustre and authority'**

Samsung's upscaling is strong, remapping HD sources to the 3,840 x 2,160 panel with panache and delivering a strong sense of 4K detail.

Image clarity holds up well during *Avengers: Assemble*'s action moments, without the need to call in Samsung's motion processing. This is just as well, actually, given that the QE65Q8DN's motion processing is a little clumsier than I'd like – at least if you stick with its Auto mode. This causes regular and noticeable unwanted side effects such as flickering and smeary haloes. If you really feel the desire to apply motion processing to the Samsung's pictures without messing up the image, try selecting the Custom option with Blur and Judder reduction components set to less than five.

Having found a chink in the TV's picture armour, I also need to discuss a couple more. The biggest issue (considering this TV's premium status) is the appearance of faint backlight blooming and blocking around objects during extremely high-contrast HDR

scenes. This can extend over quite large parts of the image at times, as you'd expect from the relatively limited number of dimming zones the TV deploys. In fact, it's probably a testament to Samsung's outstanding dimming system management that the backlight blooming isn't more pronounced.

That said, its impact occasionally distracts during high-contrast scenes that contain a lot of motion. And if you're watching a wider than 1.85:1 aspect ratio film, the blooming effect can momentarily creep into the black bars above and below the picture.

As with the Q9FN, the Q8DN only supports a pretty narrow optimum viewing angle. Colour and contrast reduce from more than around 25-30 degrees, and the aforementioned blooming around bright objects becomes more noticeable.

Things return to a positive vein with the TV's audio. Despite not being visible from the front, the Q8DN's speakers produce a rounded, clear and smooth sound underpinned by well-integrated bass. Dynamic soundtrack moments are dealt with well, with a lively but seldom harsh representation of subtle treble detailing. Voices are consistent and easy to distinguish too. Samsung's new Smart Sound option does a good job of automatically adjusting the tone and balance to best suit the type of content you're playing.

## The £100 question

Evaluating the QE65Q8DN is made complicated by its pricing. At the time of writing, it was retailing for just £100 less than Samsung's 65Q9FN, which is brighter, bundles a One Connect box and doesn't suffer the same light blooming issues. The set remains easy to recommend, however, and I wouldn't be surprised to find its price being trimmed in the not too distant future ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Samsung QE65Q8DN

→ £2,900 → [www.samsung.co.uk](http://www.samsung.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** Samsung's step-down QLED model is an emphatically good LCD TV, although the performance gap between it and the Q9FN is bigger than the current price suggests.

**3. The TV integrates both Freeview and Freesat tuners**



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STEINWAY LYNGDORF

This low-cost 6 Series 4K screen is feature-stacked. Even the smart platform impresses, enthuses **Steve May**

# Philips' budget TV barnstormer

As well as clashing bezels with rivals in the high-end OLED TV arena, Philips is fast developing a stranglehold on the budget 4K TV market. Sure, there's tempting competition from the likes of Hisense, Toshiba and others, but if you want a killer deal when it comes to small(er) 4K screens, then Philips' 6 Series should be top of any shortlist.

**1. The handset is a standard IR design with Netflix hot key**

**2. In place of Android, the TV runs Philips' SAPHI smart system**



The 43PUS6753 featured here is the latest in that lauded low-cost line. A 4K HDR flatscreen, it combines potent panel technology with a surprisingly adept new smart platform, all for £430 or less. The range also includes 50in and 55in versions, which retail for £500 and £600 respectively.

Design-wise, the 43PUS6753 hides its budget build well. The thin grey plastic frame is supported by an open metal stand, which adds a little premium flash. The set may not be super-slim, but it's hardly bulky either. The rear panel is edged in Ambilight LED bulbs.

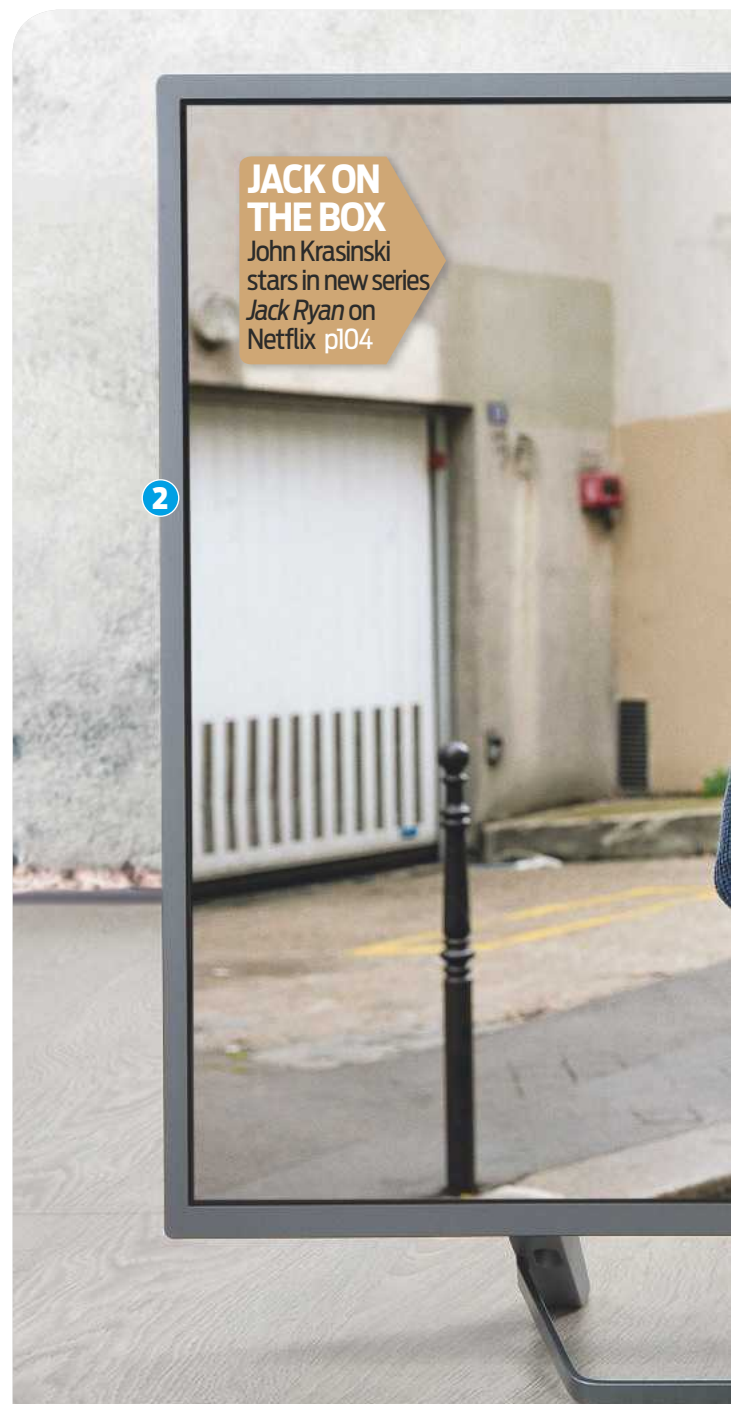
Connections include a trio of HDMI inputs, one with ARC for easy AV system hookup. All of these are 4K capable, but only two support 4K at 60Hz. There are also two USBs (with multiformat media reader), component video with stereo audio, and a digital optical audio output for connection to an external sound system. Ethernet offers an alternative to internal Wi-Fi.

## TV on tap

Smart functionality is forward-facing. The screen has a Freeview Play tuner (plus a standard satellite tuner option), so TV catchup is catered for via a seven-day roll-back programme guide.

Obviously the 43PUS6753 is 'net-connected, but here Philips doesn't use an Android TV operating system like its more expensive stablemates. Instead it runs the brand's new stripped-back Linux-based SAPHI Smart OS – and the big surprise is that it's actually rather good.

There's no app bloat, for one thing, and it does pretty much everything you need a connected screen to do. Streaming services include Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, YouTube, BBC iPlayer, ITV Hub, All4 and My5. There's also BBC News and Sport apps, plus Rakuten TV and Dailymotion. Netflix streams in 4K and HDR. YouTube





**AV INFO**

**PRODUCT:**  
43in 4K HDR LED TV  
with Ambilight

**POSITION:**  
Ranks below the  
Android-powered  
7 Series and Philips'  
OLED models

**PEERS:**  
Hisense H43A6250;  
Samsung 40MU6120

supports 4K. Navigation around all this is intuitive. The set also supports Miracasting from a connected mobile device, if that whets your whistle.

Philips' Ambilight mood-lighting system is presented in a three-sided configuration, which is essentially the default implementation. The TV throws a wash of coloured light out from the sides and the top; consequently, it looks its best when positioned close to a white wall.

All the usual Ambilight modes are here. You can set hues to Follow Video (which is to say, mimic onscreen colour movement), Follow Audio, Follow Colour and Follow Flag; the latter is a World Cup affectation that mirrors the colours of your favourite team. While this has little to offer at the moment, you will at least be ahead of the curve when it all kicks off again in Qatar in 2022...

Ambilight can also be seamlessly integrated into a Hue smart lighting system. It may not have much bearing on image prowess (although many will argue the benefits of

having a bias light behind the screen to ease eye fatigue and improve subjective contrast), but as a lifestyle embellishment, it's one of the best.

**Visually enticing**

When it comes to vivacity, this Philips impresses straight from the box. Its pictures have visual snap and healthy colours, with plenty of clarity.

The panel is capable of a supremely sharp 2,160p image, although viewing distance could be an issue with such a (relatively) small display. There's an irrefutable link between perceived resolution and viewing distance, which is why most screen manufacturers advocate we sit closer to a 4K TV than an HD one.

The screen, being a budget model, doesn't feature Philips' advanced P5 image processor, but there's still jargon to juggle. A Micro Dimming system for its direct LED implementation is aided by Pixel Precise Ultra HD



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## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview; satellite  
**CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB ports; component AV; optical digital audio output; headphone jack; RF input; Ethernet **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 20W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 971(w) x 573(h) x 77(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 8.7kg

**FEATURES:** Three-sided Ambilight; compatible with Philips Hue; built-in Wi-Fi; USB multimedia playback; Freeview Play; SAPHI smart system; Miracast; Pixel Precise Ultra HD processing; Ultra Resolution upscaling; Micro Dimming Pro; HDR Plus; DTS HD sound processing

## PARTNER WITH



**SONY UBP-X500:** For an affordable 4K Blu-ray source, head to Sony's range and consider the budget-priced (£200) UBP-X500. AV connections are limited to HDMI and USB, but the deck still offers SACD playback and hi-res file support.

3

processing and 4K UHD Natural Motion. Compared to the competition, there's a lot going on behind the scenes.

That said, the TV's cut-back image processing chops do become particularly noticeable when it comes to motion. All of Philips' presets here generate some level of artefacting, with the exception of the Movie mode. When it comes to the Natural Motion tool, your best option is to leave it set to medium.

Switching between the image modes (Natural, Standard, Movie, Personal, Game and Vivid) via the settings menu is painless – you can toggle them without needing to delve deep into menus. All prove quite engaging.

**'This is a solid mix of image quality and feature functionality, bolstered by the brilliance of Ambilight'**

With HDR content, the choices are HDR Personal, HDR Vivid, HDR Natural, HDR Movie and HDR Game. These presets are more divisive, as choosing between them can significantly affect image quality. My least favourite is the HDR Movie setting as this is relatively dull, and makes fine detail difficult to distinguish. HDR Natural, which ramps up image dynamism, is a preferable option.

Watch the opening text crawl on the 4K Blu-ray of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* in HDR Movie and the number of visible stars plummets. Viewed in any other mode, and the starfield returns. Root around the menus and you'll find HDR Plus, which can be used to provide additional lift. This is quite effective, with the medium setting being the easiest to live with.

As a Philips flatscreen, the 43PUS6753 naturally comes with no shortage of other image parameters to tinker with. Ultra Resolution, gamma and noise reduction adjustments may sound tempting, but be aware that a panel of this class doesn't easily reward manual intervention.

## HDR caveat

As well as industry standard HDR10 compatibility, the TV supports HLG – useful for those waiting for more iPlayer 4K

trials. Yet you shouldn't expect this lower-tier telly to sparkle with specular highlights, as it simply doesn't have the inherent brightness to deliver a truly high dynamic range. Yes, it understands HDR10 metadata, but there's a limit to what it can do with the information. Similarly, I understand a little Klingon, but I'd be hopeless having to fend for myself on *Kronos*.

The 43PUS6753 does a better job than many rival HDR compatible sets in the same price bracket, however. I measured peak luminance around 350 nits. While this won't sear your eyeballs or reveal the real power of a film's bright highlights, it's bright enough to not dim the panel down to unacceptable levels. The sunrise over Luke Skywalker's island hideaway in ...*The Last Jedi* appears suitably beautiful.

And it certainly helps the TV's movie credentials that its backlight uniformity is good, without distracting light blooms, and black levels reassuringly deep.

With regular SDR content, be it HD or SDR 4K, the TV is consistently bright and punchy. Indeed, I'd rate this a fine screen for hi-def sources, be they from tuner, set-top box or media streamer. Select the dedicated game mode, meanwhile, and image lag is respectable at 24ms.

The set's audio output is rated at 20W, and it certainly isn't short of welly. For casual use it does the job, although the stereo presentation is limited.

## Generating a buzz

A solid mix of image quality and feature functionality, bolstered by the brilliance of Ambilight, this 6 Series 43-inch should attract bargain hunters like bees to honey. Don't buy one if you're after a panel to really show off your UHD Blu-ray collection, but do check it out if you want a great value everyday screen for general viewing and 4K gaming ■

## HCC VERDICT

★★★★★

### Philips 43PUS6753

→ £430 → [www.philips.co.uk](http://www.philips.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** When it comes to sheer value, nothing beats this 4K HDR high-street hero, with Ambilight the LED icing on the cake. You can go bigger for the same money, but not better.

**3. The TV mixes rear-, side- and downward-facing connections**



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# Bring on the wall!

Once you've added in-ceiling speakers to your home cinema, why not get architectural with your front soundstage too? **Richard Stevenson** gets to grips with Focal's 300 Series LCR model

**I WAS EXTREMELY** impressed with Focal's 300 Series ICW 8 in-ceiling speakers back in *HCC* #286. They were an obvious audition for Atmos and DTS:X overhead duties, so what could Focal offer if you wanted the same performance and seamless installation all round the room? Enter the 300IWLCR6 full-range in-wall speaker.

Designed primarily for front-left, -right and centre channel duties, the 300IWLCR6 feature Focal's flax cone drivers, a rotating high-frequency/mid-range pod for horizontal or vertical installation, and the brand's EQI (Easy Quick Install) fitting system. The speaker is a true three-way design using a pair of 6.5in bass drivers, a 4in midrange driver and a 1in aluminium/magnesium alloy inverted dome tweeter.

Focal has been sporting flax drivers across several of its premium loudspeaker ranges for a while. The material has a number of high-tech advantages for speaker cone design, despite being old enough to feature in Shakespeare's plays. Focal uses flax fibres sandwiched between extremely thin layers of glass-fibre resin. The

result is said to be a light, stiff cone with excellent natural damping properties up there with more exotic (read: more expensive) materials such as Kevlar.

The 300IWLCR6's open-back design means you can see and feel the cones, and they are indeed light and stiff. They are thin enough to see some light through them, too, which had me thinking about installing LED backlighting for a silly moment. Each of the three flax cones is centred with a traditional paper-pulp dome phase plug and soft rubber roll surround. Excursion of the LF drivers is fairly long, suggesting these puppies are going to go loud.

The tweeter is a direct port from Focal's Aria 900 series of cabinet loudspeakers. It uses a back-to-front aluminium/magnesium alloy dome for wide dispersion and Focal's bespoke Poron suspension. This material has an amount of what Focal refers to as 'shape memory,' and the company claims it reduces distortion through the human ear's most sensitive range of 2kHz-3kHz.

A circular pod secured by four Allen bolts houses the MF driver and tweeter. Undo the bolts and you can turn

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Premium in-wall  
loudspeaker

**POSITION:**  
Flagship 300 Series  
model, above more  
affordable 100 Series

**PEERS:**  
Dali S-80 Compact;  
KEF Ci316ORL-THX;  
Monitor Audio  
CP-IW260X LCR



this through 90 degrees for when you want to fit the speaker as a centre channel.

On the front of the baffle are two switches to trim high- and mid-level frequencies. The three positions equate to +3dB, -3dB or flat, although no reference is made to the actual frequencies boosted or attenuated. Around the back you will find a pair of nickel-plated spring terminals for single-wire speaker cable.

Installation is very slick. In the box is an obvious cardboard cut-out template measuring 190mm x 570mm; you have 10mm extra room on those measurements before the whole speaker will sail clean through the hole. Depth-wise, you'll need a minimum of 95mm between the wall surface and rear of the cavity.

Pull out the six spring-loaded clamps and simply push the speaker into the cut-out, accompanied by half a dozen 'clack' noises as the clamps spring into place. It's that simple – and easy to remove too if you have to.

The package is supplied with a clear plastic paint shield, so you won't get magnolia all over your flax drivers and a near flush-fitting magnetic grille in paintable white finish. At £800 apiece, a front end of 300IWLCR6s is not a cheap option and four more for surround duties is looking painful. In which case, Focal offers the smaller 300IW6 at a less eye-watering £500 each.

## Backs against the wall

The open-backed nature of the 300IWLCR6 means the speaker's ultimate balance is somewhat at the behest of the installation. A solid MDF mounting surface, small well-damped cavity and brick back wall will create a markedly different sound to installing this speaker in a plaster-board false wall in front of a spacious void. The MF/HF trims will help counter some anomalies and your AVR's EQ should keep things further in check, but I can't help thinking sealed cabinet in-walls make more sense.

Fitted as a stereo pair into an MDF baffle over an undamped void in a timber building, the 300IWLCR6 mostly runs rough-shod over that theory. With LF boosted in dynamics and depth by the timber structure and good-volume rear cavity, the speakers punched out music with impressive dynamics and a clean, neutral balance. Vocals are projected out into the room and the tweeter remains sweet even when I began experimenting with



## SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVE UNITS:** 2 x 6.5in flax bass drivers; 1 x 4in flax midrange driver; 1 x 1in inverted dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Open-backed in-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 40Hz-28kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 92dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 150W **DIMENSIONS:** 600(h) x 220(w) x 98(d)mm; (cut out dimensions: 570(h) x 190(w)mm) **WEIGHT:** 7.9kg

**FEATURES:** Tool-free installation clamps; +/-3dB HF & MF trim switches; supplied with template, paint shield and rectangular white paintable grilles

## PARTNER WITH



**FOCAL 300ICW6:** The baby brother of the ICW 8 (see HCC #286), but its flax driver is a size match to Focal's LCR model. Priced at £350 each, these in-ceiling speakers offer the same tool-free installation and will have you Atmos'd up in no time.

ASBO-level SPLs. The claimed 92dB sensitivity may be a bit ambitious, but this in-wall is certainly not power-hungry.

Measured performance is very good with a relatively even frequency response, albeit boosted in the upper bass by my installation's natural resonances. The +3dB HF and MF settings proved just a little too fierce to balance that additional bass without proper EQ, but my AVR's Audyssey's MultEQ XT system smoothed things out a treat. Of note, the dispersion pattern is wider than it is tall when installed vertically. So it is essential to spin that tweeter pod around if fitted horizontally to ensure the widest soundstage. LF dipped down to around 50Hz (-6dB) in my installation, which is good news for your subwoofer.

A session with action classics, with the front soundstage downmixed to stereo and a REL HT/1205 attached, saw the Focals deliver a real wow-factor performance. The slow-mo rolling car-crash through the opening of *Deadpool* is a mash-up of effects, dialogue and LFE, and the 300IWLCR6s left no piece of shrapnel unaccounted for. Their pace is frenetic and bass tight, while *Deadpool*'s to-camera monologue is sonorous and intelligible – and dialogue delivery would be even further improved in a true LCR setup, as this premium in-wall speaker is outstanding at conveying the tonal characteristics of voices.

Calling on the speaker's subtler side with *Paddington* (Blu-ray) didn't disappoint. The creature's capers and the charismatic dialogue of the cast shone through the soundstage. From the ambience of the jungles of Peru to the bustling London streets, the 300IWLCR6s created an enviably believable atmosphere, even in stereo.

I can't fault the 300IWLCR6's ease of installation and its performance is top-notch. The open-backed design may mean some fine-tuning of EQ to get a reasonably flat response depending on your walls, but the underlying engineering, engaging sound and articulate dialogue handling make them a standout design in a crowded market ■

1. The speaker is usable both vertically and horizontally, via its rotatable tweeter/midrange unit

2. The 300IWLCR6 uses Focal's distinctive flax material for its mid and bass drivers

## HCC VERDICT



### Focal 300IWLCR6

→ £800 (each) → [www.focal.com/uk](http://www.focal.com/uk)

**WE SAY:** A dynamic, articulate and easy-to-drive in-wall loudspeaker with simplistic installation. Open-backed rather than sealed design.

**John Archer** admires the aggressive pricing of TCL's mid-level UHD bigscreen, but spots some cut corners

# 4K HDR for the everyman

## SOLAR FLAIR...

Season one of US sci-fi *The Expanse* makes Blu-ray contact p96





While TCL is a global giant when it comes to panel manufacture and its TVs are well-regarded in other markets, particularly the US, it has been slow to make an entry to the UK, only arriving this Summer. The 55DP648 reviewed here is part of its first wave of sets – a 55in 4K model with a price tag of now just £480. Can it do enough to help the Chinese brand get off to a flying start?

Some of its features suggest it might. For instance, it uses a VA-type panel, rather than an IPS one often seen on low-cost flatscreens. VA panels generally deliver significantly better contrast than IPS rivals – although the latter provide a wider effective viewing angle. TCL also claims the TV's colour handling reaches 95% of the DCI-P3 colour space.

Its native 4K pixel count is also joined by HDR support, in both HDR10 and HLG flavours, and the set offers Freeview Play integration (providing access to all of the UK's main terrestrial broadcasting catch-up services), as well as Netflix in both 4K and HDR, and YouTube.

Yet there are also some things that those with knowledge of TCL's US models might be looking for that are missing. One concerns its panel illumination. The 55DP648 uses edge LED lighting rather than a direct LED array, and there's no local dimming; the TV can only dim all of its LEDs uniformly based on an ongoing analysis of the picture it's showing. This approach seems likely to struggle to deliver contrast as good as those of TCL's predominantly direct-lit American models (which also add Dolby Vision HDR to the feature roster).

And there's more disappointment when you start exploring the 55DP648's smart menus. These look basic and somewhat out-dated, with no trace of either the Roku platform TCL uses in the US, or the Android system it employs elsewhere in Europe (although to be honest, not having Android is no great loss...). Amazon Prime Video was AWOL at the time of writing, too, as was Rakuten TV and Now TV.

If you want this TCL to be a streaming TV partner, you might want to add a third-party media player.

## A cut above

For an affordable largescreen TV, the 55DP648 is attractive. Its bodywork is startlingly thin, both at the back and around the screen. Its gleaming metallic finish is also a cut above the budget norm. In fact, the only real exterior hint at the 55DP648's budget nature is its provision of just two USB ports and three HDMI inputs, when most 4K TVs these days muster three and four respectively.

There's an odd quirk with these HDMI's, too, in that you need to activate an HDMI 2.0 feature in a distant sub-menu of the Systems menu before HDR plays into the TV properly.

The 55DP648 provides precious few picture settings to play with. Just remember that Movie mode gives the brightest HDR picture, while the Natural preset sacrifices a little brightness to provide a less intense colour palette.

The Dynamic setting you'd normally expect to deliver the most punchy picture takes the

average brightness level of HDR content too low, as it tries to provide the appearance of a wider light range between the darkest and lightest parts of the image. And this facet of the Dynamic mode gives an early warning as to the 55DP648's biggest picture quality limitation: its lack of brightness. In fact, at best it only measured 297 nits when showing a 10 per cent white HDR window, which is only marginally above the sort of

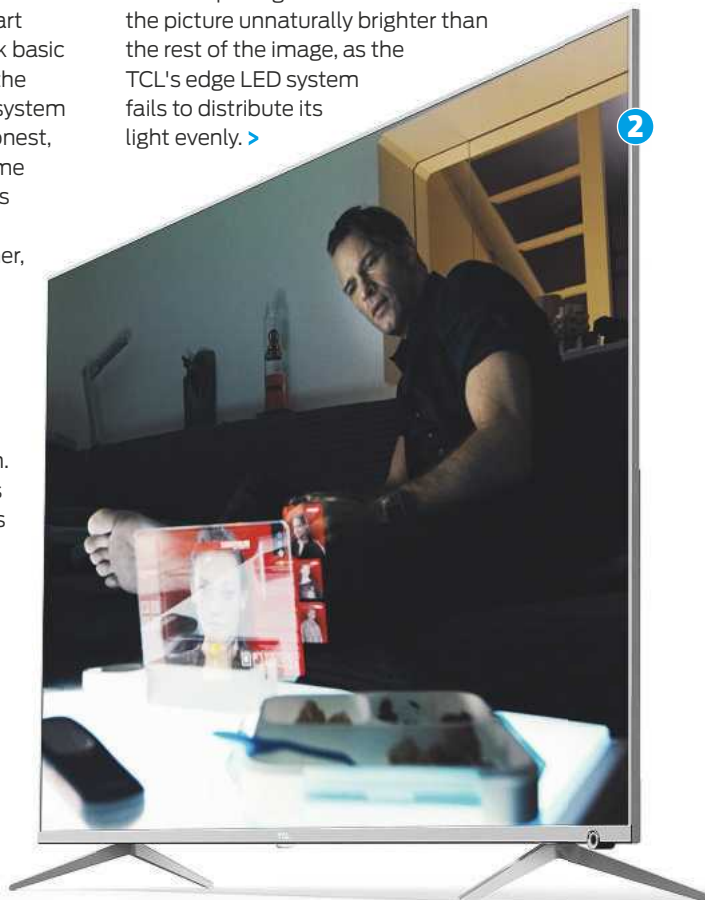
light level needed to show SDR material. Hardly surprising, then, that the set doesn't do much justice to high dynamic range movies. There's only a marginal increase in even the brightness of small light peaks when you switch between SDR and HDR sources, and even less increase in average brightness levels. In fact, the need to offer an expanded light range when you've got such limited peak brightness to play with can result in HDR pictures often looking less bright than SDR counterparts.

## Fallen brightness

The bright exteriors on Isla Nublar in *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom* on 4K Blu-ray highlight this problem well, sometimes looking less intense overall on the 55DP648 than they do if you watch the SDR Blu-ray.

The tough demands HDR places on a TV's light controls also expose black level issues. The night-time shots at the start of *...Fallen Kingdom* appear here slightly grey, rather than inky black as they should. This is especially noticeable when the darkness has to share the screen with something bright, such as the film's glowing title, or artificial lighting.

This opening scene also finds corners of the picture unnaturally brighter than the rest of the image, as the TCL's edge LED system fails to distribute its light evenly. >



## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Affordable 55in 4K HDR LCD TV

**POSITION:**  
Around the middle of TCL's current UK range, below the DC748

**PEERS:**  
Philips 55PUS6753; Hisense H55U7A

**1.** The 55DP648 uses a 10-bit 4K VA panel and edge LEDs

**2.** HDR10 playback is joined by HLG support, but not Dolby Vision



## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview HD; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 3 x HDMI inputs; 2 x USB ports; RF input; headphone jack; optical digital audio output; Ethernet **SOUND (CLAIMED):** 2 x 8W **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** 310 nits **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** 'Mega' **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,227(w) x 715(h) x 75(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 14.8kg

**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; USB/DLNA multimedia playback; 10-bit panel; edge LED system with micro dimming processing; Freeview Play for UK catch-up TV services; TCL smart system includes Netflix 4K HDR; UHD colour extender processing; 5mm-thin bezel

## PARTNER WITH



**JBL BAR STUDIO:** This soundbar's £130 ticket means it's not quite budget territory – and the reward is a cracking performance, with a tangible bass delivery and a virtual surround mode that widens the soundfield. Includes HDMI ARC.

3

There are dynamic contrast and backlight adjustments in the 55DP648's menus that can reduce the greyiness. But these adjust the backlight slowly and heavily-handedly, and prove distracting.

These average black levels and brightness inevitably restrict the sort of colour volume (brightness applied to colour) the 55DP648 can produce, despite its wide colour panel design. The expanded colour spectrums are part of the attraction of most HDR sources, and in this regard the TV fails to dazzle.

It also loses brightness and colour if viewed from an angle of more than 25 degrees – a problem that, admittedly, doesn't just affect entry-level LCD models. And its lack of light control and contrast prevents it from delivering fine detail in the *...Fallen Kingdom* 4K Blu-ray picture as successfully as more expensive TVs.

## Back to Blu-ray

Okay, so the 55DP648 hasn't exactly blown me away so far. Fortunately, though, it becomes much more interesting if you think of it as just a budget standard dynamic range 4K TV, suited to your Blu-ray collection and broadcast sources.

Switching to the Full HD (and SDR) Blu-ray of *...Fallen Kingdom*, the set's black levels immediately look much more consistently convincing, actually outperforming many budget rivals. Colours are reasonably rich and balanced, and the picture no longer feels uncomfortably dark, even if it certainly never looks particularly bright. Colour blends and skin tones are free of banding and blocking noise, and the overall viewing experience is agreeable – consider the size of the TV and the meagre asking price, and the appeal grows even more.

And the 55DP648 also upscales the HD images of the *...Fallen Kingdom* Blu-ray pretty well. There's a clear increase in detail and sharpness, without TCL's upscaling processing exaggerating source noise.

Another palpable mark in the plus column comes from the TV's input lag, which I measured at just 10ms when

the Game mode was selected. This humbles pretty much any other TV available, including premium models, and makes for a responsive gaming session – although, of course, while its image lag might be imperceptible, game graphics miss the visual impact provided by other brighter, crisper displays.

While the TV's skinny design is attractive, it doesn't leave much room for a potent integrated sound system; TCL's 2 x 8W speaker rig is somewhat feeble. Bass is

**'The TV's input lag measured just 10ms in Game mode – this humbles pretty much any other TV available'**

underpowered, and the sound feels congested and muted. Dinosaur feet pounding the earth in *...Fallen Kingdom* aren't conveyed with scale or terror, and there's no force behind supposedly punchy sounds like gunshots and explosions. Dialogue is reasonably clear and believable, at least – but with streamed sources I had noticeable lip-sync issues that made them all but unwatchable. The set does provide an audio delay system, but this wasn't able to fix the problem.

The final judgement, then, is the 55DP648 performs well in some areas, but falls short in others. Its major selling point is its price/size ratio, rather than its smart TV system or 4K HDR performance, and other brands are muscling in on this area too; you can pick up Philips' superior (in every way) 55PUS6753 for £130 more than the 55DP648, for instance. That said, if you can't stretch past £500 and you're after a 55in set for 4K (predominantly SDR) viewing, this does the job fine ■

## HCC VERDICT



### TCL 55DP648

→ £480 → [www.tcl.eu/uk](http://www.tcl.eu/uk)

**WE SAY:** While this 55-incher isn't bright enough for immersive HDR playback and deploys a very basic smart system, it's still a solid SDR 4K option for its money.

**3. With Freeview Play onboard, there's easy access to UK terrestrial catch-up**

**4. At its slimmest, the TV measures just 9mm – but bulks out around its bottom**

4





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# Squeeze me in

The SC-HTB258 takes the idea of the compact soundbar to another level. But can this small 2.1 system still make a big impact? **Mark Craven** investigates

**HAVING ALMOST HAD** to knock down an interior wall to accommodate LG's gigantic SK10Y soundbar [see *HCC* #288], Panasonic's SC-HTB258 is a welcome change of pace. A compact 2.1 soundbar system (perhaps the smallest I've ever auditioned) selling for £150, it won't appeal to anyone with an eye on LG's

Atmos flagship. But then it doesn't try to. This is all about saving space and being easy to live with.

Even the subwoofer element has been crafted with simple integration in mind. A 5.5in driver design, it connects wirelessly, as all seem to do these days, and can be stood vertically (as pictured) or laid

horizontally, perhaps within a TV/AV unit. Four rubbery feet can be attached to the relevant supporting side.

The actual soundbar measures 45cm wide, a shade over 5cm high, and is light enough to wield in one hand. Yet it's pretty, seems well put together, and uses its depth (it's more of a slab than a 'bar') to integrate a port for its pair of full-range drivers.

Physical connections are HDMI ARC, optical digital audio and USB for service/firmware. There's also Bluetooth streaming.

## Out for Justice

Two things are most noticeable about the SC-HTB258 from the off – its bass performance is impressive, but the 'bar' struggles to break free from its own compact dimensions.

In *Justice League* (Sky Cinema), the low-frequency thuds and thwacks as the team take on Steppenwolf have genuine meat to

## SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVERS:** 2 x 4in x 1.5in full-range drivers  
**AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 120W  
**CONNECTIONS:** 1 x HDMI output; optical digital audio input; USB (service)  
**DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** No/No  
**SEPARATE SUB:** Yes, 5.5in  
**REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 450(w) x 51(h) x 135(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.6kg

**FEATURES:** Bluetooth; bass reflex cabinet design; Movie, Music and Standard sound presets; vertical or horizontal subwoofer installation; dimmable LED display; HDMI CEC control; ARC (Audio Return Channel)

them. Nothing earth-shattering, and prone to one-note boominess, but more than enough to bring that all-important sense of spectacle. At the same time, the bar's full-range drivers keep the chaos of hordes of parademons well delineated, albeit with a slightly soft approach to treble details.

A strong lower mid-range not only helps to tie Panasonic's two-piece system together, creating a cohesive and surprisingly balanced performance from a budget offering, but works well with voices, particularly Ben Affleck's faux Batman growl.

However, the SC-HTB258 doesn't project particularly well. Its smallscale design is complemented by a soundfield that's quite narrow, leaving you with the impression of audio that's always tethered closely to the partnered screen. Stereo effects are conveyed, but don't spread wide.

Control via the credit card remote is hit and miss, too. There appear to be countless volume steps, so finding the right level is a bit of a faff, and the use of a single key to cycle through Music, Movie or Standard sound modes (with LEDs to denote the current one) leaves you wondering why you don't just get three physical buttons.

My advice is to find the mode you like and stick with it (Movie offers the most visceral performance). Then, if you're running an HDMI connection to an HDMI CEC compatible display, you can leave that dinky remote in a drawer and use your TV's own zapper instead.

An obvious partner for a 50in or below flatscreen, the SC-HTB258 is a confident 2.1 performer. JBL's Bar Studio [see *HCC* #283] sells for a smidgeon less and offers a wider, more enticing soundfield, but isn't quite so easy to wire up, fire up and forget ■

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Compact 2.1 HDMI soundbar system

**POSITION:**  
Not one of Panasonic's AllPlay models, but above the SC-HTB208 and SC-HTBT200

**PEERS:**  
JBL Bar Studio; Acoustic Energy Aego Sound3ar

## HCC VERDICT



### Panasonic SC-HTB258

→ £150 → [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** Ease of use, compact dimensions and a tangible boost over most flatscreen audio systems are the lure here.





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# Freeview for all

Set-top box brand Manhattan returns with new-look hardware and targets free-to-air timeshifters with this affordable PVR.

**Martin Pipe** tunes in



The T2-R packs a 500GB HDD

I REMEMBER GETTING my first PVR fifteen years ago – a Pace Twin with a 20GB hard drive, rendered useless a few years later by technical changes to the terrestrial broadcast platform (see p68 for more). Around the same time the Pace Twin was in retailers, a company called Eurosat was supplying digital satellite receivers under the Manhattan brand to enthusiasts via a network of specialist dealers.

Manhattan has since moved to the

mainstream, and its latest contender is the T2-R – a lozenge-shaped Freeview HD PVR with 500GB of storage, dual tuners, and basic online functionality. Its price? A wallet-friendly £120.

The T2-R's emphasis is on HDMI and a 1.2m cable is supplied (although

the company can sell a composite AV lead to those with sets they really should have replaced by now). Connected and powered up, you'll find Manhattan's onscreen tuning wizard. As with other Freeview kit, your location has to be entered so the correct channels are listed in the EPG and duplicates removed.

The neatness, clarity and responsiveness of the T2-R's everyday user interface is worth praising. It's driven by a decent handset that can also operate many TVs.

At this price you don't get luxuries like app control; use the electronic programme guide (EPG) to select channels for viewing or recording instead. This can also 'remind' you when a programme is due to start and supports series-linking. If there's a schedule clash, you're invited to set recordings on the offending channel individually as some showings might not be problematic. The T2-R also highlights alternative broadcasts of a show – specifically on '+1' channels.

The box has an Ethernet port – there's no Wi-Fi alternative – but it's not harnessed by

## SPECIFICATIONS

**HDD:** Yes. 500GB **TUNER:** Yes. 2 x Freeview HD **CONNECTIONS:** Aerial input; aerial loopthrough output; HDMI output; analogue AV (3.5mm, composite video and stereo audio); optical digital audio output; Ethernet; USB (firmware) **DIMENSIONS:** 265(w) x 53(h) x 207(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 682g

**FEATURES:** 8-day EPG; favourite channel list; chasing playback; 'retro-active' recording (complete programme in HDD buffer can be saved to your recordings list); simultaneous recording; 30-day undelete function; HD simulcast notification; series link recording; 5.1 support (AAC transcoded to AC3)

delights like catch-up, remote scheduling, Netflix or streaming from DLNA servers (similarly, a rear-panel USB port is for firmware upgrades and not multimedia purposes). But Ethernet does provide access to online services, which are inserted into the EPG. Some (for example, Planet Knowledge) are slick on-demand portals where ad-supported programmes are selected for playback. Others, like the religious channel SBN, are live streams with individual programmes listed in the guide. When one is selected and the 'please wait, loading stream' banner appears, the box becomes less responsive – presumably because streaming places greater demand on the T2-R hardware.

Returning to the EPG isn't straightforward because the relevant handset button is disabled. You have to go up or down a channel until a known 'off-air' one is reached; the EPG can then be accessed. Manhattan/Freeview should identify streaming channels in the guide, especially as online content can't be recorded, and an attempt to engage chasing playback caused the T2-R to crash.

HD channels are crisp and vibrant. It excavated detail from *Bodyguard*'s murkier scenes while visually complex props like computer displays are well-rendered. In comparison, standard-def channels are soft and pallid. With SD or HD, motion is smooth with no untoward judder provided the source material is up to it.

## Setting the scene

The specification here is basic but well implemented, and Manhattan's new styling is a nice improvement on its boxy designs of old. And the T2-R nicely whets the appetite for the company's incoming T3-R, which adds streaming bells and whistles ■

## HCC VERDICT



### Manhattan T2-R

→ £120 → [manhattan-tv.com](http://manhattan-tv.com)

**WE SAY:** Some may rue the lack of streaming apps/media playback, but this twin-tuner PVR succeeds when it comes to ease of use.

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Freeview HD PVR

**POSITION:**  
Manhattan's entry-level PVR, next to a Freeview Play/networked STB

**PEERS:**  
Humax HDR-1800T; Panasonic DMR-HWT130





# Complex LG hero

Dolby Vision and Dolby Atmos support are backed up by smart control and improved image processing on this largescreen OLED. **Steve May** gets to work

**LG OLED TVs** are getting smarter, thanks to a new A9 image processor plus ThinQ AI. The 65in C8 reviewed here represents the jumping on point for this sentient silicon, below the E8, G8 and W8 models.

Its brain may be big, but the C8 is thin, swelling out only to accommodate electronics and connectivity. Also available in 55in and 77in screen sizes, it looks suave with grey trim and edge-to-edge glass.

Ports include four 4K-ready HDMI, three USBs, a digital optical audio output and Ethernet. Wi-Fi and Bluetooth are standard, and Freeview Play is built-in. If you tire of UK catch-up, there's 4K Netflix, Amazon and YouTube to chow down on, plus Rakuten TV's growing slate of 4K Dolby Vision movies with Atmos.

We've long applauded LG's

WebOS system; now ThinQ AI adds intuitive search and voice control. The C8 comes with LG's latest Magic Remote, which has an integrated microphone to provide interaction with the ThinQ AI brain. Being a doofus, I constantly pushed the mic button when I actually wanted the OK wheel, but that apart the cursor system still works well.

Picture quality is nearly always stunning. The set's 2018 Alpha 9 intelligent processor does a fine job, although venturing into the TV's menus is now a bit like visiting The Upside Down. You will be confused.

With 35 per cent more raw power, and twice as much memory, LG has developed ingenious new ways to improve image quality. These include quad-step noise reduction and de-contouring, plus an entirely new image enhancement system with frequency-based sharpness control, object-based contrast optimisation, and an adaptive colour process used in the set's Vivid mode. Colour mapping has also been significantly enhanced. The boffins have been busy – and one unexpected benefit of this wizardry is that the TV's onscreen text displays are appreciably sharper.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** No **4K:** Yes. 3,840 x 2,160 **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HLG; Dolby Vision; Technicolor **TUNER:** Yes. Freeview; satellite **CONNECTIONS:** 4 x HDMI inputs; 3 x USB ports; Ethernet; optical digital audio output **SOUND:** 2 x 10W, plus 20W subwoofer **BRIGHTNESS (CLAIMED):** N/A **CONTRAST RATIO (CLAIMED):** N/A **DIMENSIONS (OFF STAND):** 1,449(w) x 831(h) x 47(d)mm **WEIGHT (OFF STAND):** 21kg

**FEATURES:** Built-in Wi-Fi; Bluetooth; Alpha 9 processing engine; WebOS with ThinQ AI; voice control; Google Assistant compatible

The set's HDR performance is in line with comparable 2018 OLED panels. I measured a peak luminance of 840 nits with a 5 per cent window. The TV delivers the thrills of HDR highlights, aided by OLED's pixel-level luminance control.

Rich blacks are as advertised, and Season Two of *Stranger Things* (Netflix) plays with an eerie level of shadowed detail. Meanwhile, the super-pig in *Okja* (Netflix, Dolby Vision) looks astonishingly lifelike, its eyes sparkling with intelligence.

LG has made some changes to its motion handling this year, with mixed results. Certainly in terms of detail retention, the C8 performs well. Both its TruMotion Smooth and Clear modes offer crisp detail, excellent for fast-moving sports. Yet motion haloing remains an issue.

My preferred back-stop was the User setting, with de-judder on or near zero, and de-blur set to 10 or close. A new black-frame insertion Motion Pro setting is available as a User adjustment, but this dims the picture and introduces flicker. It also makes pans stutter, so it's not an option I'd advocate.

Audio quality is above average, but doesn't compete with the Acoustic Surface Technology of Sony's AF8 TV, or the soundbar theatrics of Philips' OLED903. That said, you can always bitstream Dolby Atmos from the set's Netflix app over HDMI ARC into a suitable sound system.

## Satisfaction guaranteed

It would be dumb to suggest the LG C8 is anything other than a cracking OLED TV. It presents a superb picture, not just with 4K HDR, and its smart platform is class-leading. Sometimes a challenge to use, to be sure, but the C8 is a satisfying OLED option ■

### AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** 65in 4K HDR OLED TV with Dolby Vision

**POSITION:** Entry-level Alpha 9 processor OLED, one up from the B8

**PEERS:** Sony KD-65AF8; Panasonic TX-65FZ802

### HCC VERDICT



#### LG OLED65C8

→ £3,000 → [www.lg.com/uk](http://www.lg.com/uk)

**WE SAY:** This 65-incher can be a tad baffling to use, but it's a dazzling picture performer with a comprehensive smart platform.

# Panasonic aims low with HDR10+

Impressive visuals, HDR10+ playback and hi-res audio support make this affordable UHD player a solid bet, argues **Steve May**

No front-panel display here



**LIKE MANY LOW-COST** disc spinners, Panasonic's DP-UB420 appears to be an unexciting black box. The lightweight, less-than-full-width chassis is undistinguished, and there's no front fascia display beyond a simple LED status light.

Around the back are two HDMI ports, configured as separate AV plus audio-only outputs. 4K HDR can only be sent from one of these. Other connections include digital optical audio and Ethernet, to supplement the player's onboard Wi-Fi.

The supplied remote is a short, stubby affair with dedicated Netflix button. There are also on-body controls for tray eject and power.

But these are just details. The key appeal of the DP-UB420 lies beneath the lid. There's actually no difference to the core HCX image processing here to models higher up the Panasonic food chain. The promise is performance without the price.

The user interface is unchanged from previous Panasonic players, using graphical

tabs designated Videos, Music, Photos, Home Network, Network Service and Setup.

The player requires only a modicum of the latter. You'll need to manually toggle the output to best suit your display. Menu options include OLED, Super High luminance LCD, Middle or High

Luminance LCD, and Basic Luminance options for projectors and low-brightness sets.

Streaming service support is somewhat rudimentary. You're essentially offered Netflix, Amazon Video and YouTube, as well as BBC News and Sport. The Netflix and Amazon apps only support HD and 5.1, so no 4K or Dolby Atmos. However there is a firmware update to 4K promised, so things could improve.

When it comes to 4K Blu-ray, the deck is more obliging, supporting both HDR10 and HDR10+ (but not Dolby Vision). An SDR/HDR conversion circuit is provided to automatically 'upscale' all streaming SDR into HDR. This only works with network content, not discs. Depending on the native talents of your TV, this may or may not be a good thing.

If you prefer things *au naturel*, SDR to HDR conversion can be defeated. There's also an HLG to HDR (PQ) converter option, to be deployed with non-HLG displays, but this is of no obvious use at the moment.

## It's Milla time

Image quality is first-rate. With the UB420 slotted into a mid-range Atmos 5.1.2 system, and *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter* disgorging 2160p splatter and Dolby Atmos carnage, you'd never suspect this was a budget deck.

4K clarity is spot on. Fine detail is presented without artefacts, and the quality of bitstream audio determined not by this hardware but the decoder further up the system chain.

The deck had no problem finding media servers on my network, and happily unspooled

## SPECIFICATIONS

**3D:** Yes. **ULTRA HD:** Yes. **HDR:** Yes. HDR10; HDR10+ **UPSCALING:** Yes. 2160p **MULTIREGION:** No. Region B BD; R2 DVD **HDMI:** Yes. 2 x output (1 x 2.0) **MULTICHANNEL ANALOGUE:** No **DIGITAL AUDIO:** Yes. Optical digital audio output **ETHERNET:** Yes **BUILT IN WI-FI:** Yes **SACD/DVD-A:** No/No **DIMENSIONS:** 320(w) x 45(h) x 197(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 1.4kg

**FEATURES:** 2 x USB ports; smart portal; DLNA media playback with support for FLAC, WAV, ALAC, DSD, WMA, AAC, MP3 and AIFF audio; HCX image processor; SDR to HDR conversion; HLG to HDR10 conversion

24-bit FLAC and DSD files, sounding quite majestic in the process. This isn't a universal disc spinner though. SACDs are roundly ignored and only the Dolby Digital layer of a DVD-A disc plays back.

Disc loading speeds are quick; a movie platter took 43 seconds to get from tray to main menu, while a simpler music concert title needed just 34 seconds. The deck itself does sound a bit clunky during disc loading, but any transport noise during playback is mainly masked by your sound system.

## No disgrace

If you're after a 4K spinner but don't have the funds or inclination to splurge on a battleship-style flagship, the DP-UB420 is a surprisingly good solution. Its AV talents belie the basic construction, offering a level of visual refinement that wouldn't disgrace an upscale theatre.

For most users, the key performance difference between this cheapie and its step-up brothers will be sonic. If you're not seeking a player that can double as an audiophile source in the analogue domain, and can live with the basic build and current lack of 4K streaming apps, it represents good value ■

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:**  
Low-cost UHD  
Blu-ray player

**POSITION:**  
Below the UB820,  
and a Currys PC  
World exclusive

**PEERS:**  
Sony UBP-X700;  
Samsung  
UBD-M9000

## HCC VERDICT



**Panasonic DP-UB420**

→ £250 → [www.panasonic.co.uk](http://www.panasonic.co.uk)

**WE SAY:** Fine UHD image quality, hi-res file support and HDR10+ compatibility make up for the lightweight build and basic streaming apps.



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*System image includes S 809 HCS, S 810 SUB and S 8 ATM*



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# Edifier high-flyer?

**Ed Selley** swaps out his soundbar for an active 2.1-channel TV/music system from audio marque Edifier. Will Smith and Tommy Lee Jones help out with the audition...

**BILLED AS OFFERING** 'old school style with a modern sound', Edifier's S350DB consists of an active subwoofer partnered with two satellite speakers. What makes this fairly unusual is that the system is completely self-contained. As well as carrying the power for the subwoofer, the amplification for the satellites is built into the bass-maker too, as well as source inputs. Quite a few inputs actually – the Edifier comes with optical and coaxial digital audio ports, AptX Bluetooth and a pair of analogue line inputs. There's no HDMI provision though.

In order to get power and signal to the satellite speakers, the S350DB connects via umbilical cables, which are supplied. These cables are different for each speaker, as the right-hand satellite has bass, treble and balance controls located on its side, so you don't need to reach down the back of the subwoofer to fiddle about. The cables are

long enough to allow for fairly free positioning of the satellites but are quite hefty things and will be very visible unless hidden behind furniture.

Otherwise though, this 2.1 array is an impressive looking piece of kit for the money (£250). The dark 'wood' finish to the satellites and 8in subwoofer is a little retro but looks smart enough and everything feels impressively solid. There are some good incidental details too, such as the matching metal-finish dust caps on the satellites and the sub, and the pleasant circular remote control which is a little too easy to hold backwards but looks very smart. Compared to most equivalently priced soundbars (which the S350DB presents itself as an alternative too), it feels like a lot of product for the money.

## Here come the Men in Black

No less importantly, this system manages to sound wholly convincing. Nostalgically revisiting the end sequence around the Saturn V in *Men in Black III* (Blu-ray), the Edifier's array does a more than reasonable job of ensuring that dialogue, Foley effects and score are easy to discern from one another, but also woven into a satisfying performance as a whole.

## SPECIFICATIONS

**DRIVERS:** 2 x titanium dome tweeters; 2 x mid-range drivers **AMPLIFICATION (CLAIMED):** 150W (speakers plus sub) **CONNECTIONS:** Optical digital audio input; coaxial digital audio input; 2 x stereo phono inputs **DOLBY ATMOS/DTS:X:** No/No **SEPARATE SUB:** Yes, 8in **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 312(h) x 266(w) x 298(d) mm (subwoofer); 222(h) x 127(w) x 156(d) mm (speaker) **WEIGHT:** 19.1kg (total)

**FEATURES:** AptX Bluetooth; Bass, Treble and Balance controls; speaker cabling supplied; front-firing ported subwoofer

### The right-hand speaker houses EQ/balance controls

When the rocket finally starts its engines, the subwoofer handles the low-end energy on offer without tipping over into the sort of uncontrolled booming that can bedevil some affordable bass boxes.

The handover to the satellites is via a fixed point crossover (manual adjustment would have been nice). It's at a high enough frequency to ensure the best performance is gained by keeping the subwoofer on axis with the speaker. Do this, though, and the performance is impressively cohesive. The spectacular noises of drones in sci-fi flick *Oblivion* (Blu-ray) are divided between the sub and the satellites, but from my listening position it feels very much like a well sorted stereo image. And across a wider selection of film and TV material, this is something the Edifier does consistently well. There isn't any form of pseudo surround processing offered, but the image is wide enough that this doesn't really matter.

As a final welcome addition, the basic layout of the S350DB means that as £250 all-in-one systems go, it's a solid choice for music. Listening to the massive, sweeping and very slightly bonkers *Fists of Fury* by Kamasi Washington, via AptX Bluetooth from Tidal, the result is a tonally rich and vivid performance that benefits from the smooth handover between the sub and sats. The bass notes start and stop with commendable speed and accuracy; the whole performance is engaging.

The S350DB is bulkier than rival soundbars, the looks are something of a matter of taste, and the cables are hardly discreet. Yet the performance here is rewarding considering the price tag ■

## AV INFO

**PRODUCT:** Active 2.1 speaker system

**POSITION:** Joins soundbars, wireless speakers and PC audio kit in Edifier's stable

**PEERS:** Acoustic Energy Aego<sup>3</sup>; Q Acoustics M7

## HCC VERDICT



**Edifier S350DB**

→ £250 → [www.edifier.com](http://www.edifier.com)

**WE SAY:** Separate speakers give a more tangible stereo effect than most soundbars, and overall this somewhat retro setup sounds good.



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# 20 years of digital TV

**Martin Pipe** timeshifts to 1998 to follow a story of Sky, the BBC, proto 'smart' systems and Johnny Vegas talking to a puppet monkey

The satellite revolution of the 1990s gave birth to the UK's first digital platform



**OVER THE 1990s**, Sky's satellite TV service – then analogue – had gained acceptance in UK homes, thanks mostly to its sports coverage and movie channels. The associated dishes became a common sight, sprouting on walls like municipal acne, and by 1996 Sky claimed six million subscribers, enjoying over forty channels. In contrast, analogue terrestrial TV viewers had little to be excited about.

At the beginning of the decade, terrestrial TV was limited to four channels, eventually rising to five when The Spice Girls heralded the arrival of a new network (Channel 5) in 1997. Even this development had proved difficult. Room had to be made on the UHF TV broadcast band, and teams of technicians around the country were recruited to deal with reception problems – the UHF channels available to the service (35 and 37) were close to those used by the RF modulators of VCRs, and 'out of band' to many rooftop aerials.

Lack of choice wasn't the only problem with terrestrial television, of course. Its 4:3 pictures were subject to a phenomenon known as multipath distortion; signals from the TV transmitter would bounce off tall buildings, being received at affected locations slightly later on account of their longer routes. Seen as 'ghost images', these signals could in some cases make channels unwatchable. When London's Canary Wharf tower went up in the early 1990s, TV viewers in the surrounding area suffered ghosting so bad they eventually filed a lawsuit (unsuccessfully) against the building's owners. Analogue TV was also affected by reflections off passing aircraft (which caused the picture to 'flutter'), while its 625-line composite PAL-standard signal could lack definition and suffer from cross-colour effects like patterning in areas of fine detail. Something needed to change. And in 1998, it did...



## MAC's all folks

Before we get to that point, it's worth noting that a brave attempt to deal with the limitations of PAL was commercial reality for a while in 1990. British Satellite Broadcasting, the BSB of 'squarial' infamy, used a technology known as D-MAC. Developed in the UK by the Independent Broadcast Authority, D-MAC transmitted the colour and luminance (greyscale) elements of the picture separately thanks to a process called multiplexed analogue components (the 'MAC' of the name).

D-MAC was a legal requirement of the UK's 'official' direct broadcast by satellite (DBS) service. The decision of Sky Television to launch with PAL via the Astra satellites, a cheaper option, caused much gnashing of teeth at the time. But PAL proved acceptable to most viewers – you only got ghosting (in this case, breakthrough from an adjacent channel) if equipment had been poorly installed, and many enjoyed stereo sound (in analogue form) with their pictures for the first time. For the quality conscious, however, including home cinema enthusiasts who chose Laserdisc over VHS, it was a different matter. The Scart sockets of BSB's set-top boxes delivered RGB signals to a TV, and the improvement was obvious. The D-MAC system also supported digital stereo audio, 16:9 widescreen pictures and data transmission. A migratory path to the exciting new world of hi-def TV – HD-MAC – was promised too.

The demise of the five-channel BSB meant its costly D-MAC services were shut down, but not before they'd demonstrated that TV pictures could be conveyed to the home with better quality than was considered possible with PAL – a system that dates back to 1962. Yet MAC was inefficient in terms of space (a single service would occupy an entire UHF channel or satellite transponder), so attention turned elsewhere.

Skip to 1993, when the EBU and European Commission decided to throw its weight behind the international open standards for terrestrial, satellite and cable broadcasting that would become known as DVB (Digital Video Broadcasting). The DVB Project is today a worldwide alliance of 200 organisations – kit makers, broadcasters, telecoms firms, standards bodies, satellite operators and government institutions.

DVB standards are continually updated, but by the mid-'90s had reached the point where they could form the basis of a practical digital TV service. DVB-S (satellite) was ready in 1993, and DVB-C (cable) followed a year later. Owing to its complexity – multipath effects and fluttering were difficult nuts to crack – terrestrial (DVB-T) had to wait until 1995.

With DVB, the video content of each channel is encoded in MPEG-2 – the lossy digital compression system that underpins DVD. Flags identify whether the video's aspect ratio is 4:3 or anamorphically squeezed 16:9. The associated audio is compressed with MPEG-1 Layer 2 (related to MP3) or Dolby Digital. Video and audio are combined, alongside data like teletext and subtitle captions, into a program stream. Several program streams

– channels – can be combined into a single transport stream that is digitally modulated onto a satellite transponder, cable or terrestrial channel (the latter is popularly described as a 'multiplex').

DVB is therefore considerably more efficient than analogue broadcasting; today more than ten TV channels can be packed into the space that was once occupied by one. The MPEG-2 streams are conveyed in high-quality digital component (YUV) form, which a compatible set-top box can feed into a display as a component or RGB (Scart) signal. However, all of the early DVB boxes also boasted a composite PAL output for older hardware.

Other features that DVB offered included an electronic programme guide (EPG); a range of secure and transparent conditional-access systems; pay-per-view compatibility with existing teletext services; subtitles; digital radio; multiple soundtracks (different languages, or audio descriptions for the hard of hearing); and the promise of interactivity.

In 1995 the BBC established a pilot project to demonstrate the feasibility of digital TV. A low-powered terrestrial transmitter at the Crystal Palace site, fed from a widescreen-capable playout area in west London's Television Centre, allowed the Beeb to assist in the development of standards and specifications for DVB-T, multiplexing services and MPEG coding. It also allowed the broadcaster to gain experience of signal coverage and reception issues, while showcasing the potential of the technology to interested parties. The pilot – which won an industry award – was followed in 1996 by the establishment of a project team with a brief to launch BBC radio and TV channels on satellite, cable and terrestrial digital platforms as they became available.

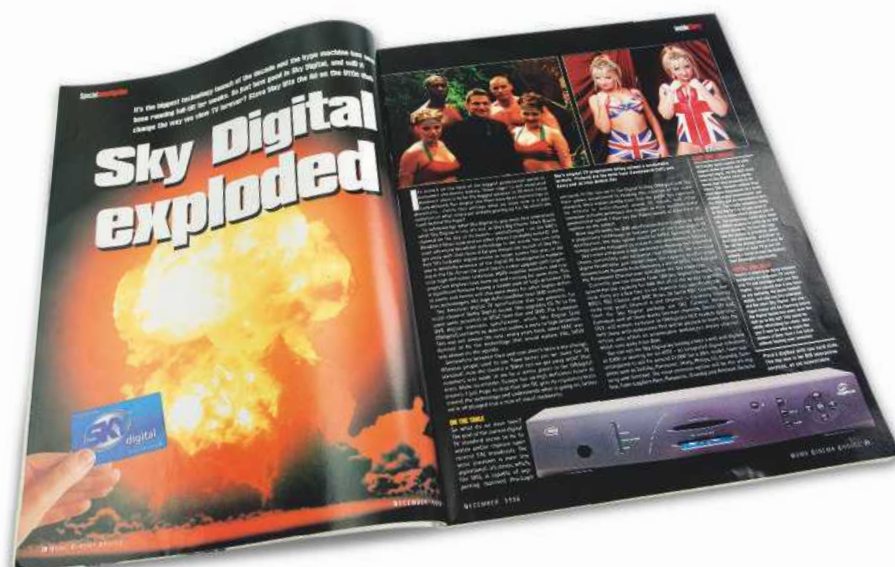
## Look to the Sky

The first digital TV platform to go live in the UK was BSkyB's Sky Digital, on October 1st 1998.



Digital TV promised a growth in channels and performance improvements – naturally HCC was excited

Sky Digital debuted in October 1998 with a choice of digibox receivers



Four 'digiboxes' – from Panasonic, Grundig, Pace and Amstrad – were available, followed shortly by a Sony model that boasted the luxury of a digital audio output.

The boxes were partnered with a black-mesh minidish that was less obtrusive than the bigger dishes associated with analogue Sky. The two dishes were aimed at different satellite clusters – while Astra 1 (with an orbital position of 19.2 degrees east) continued to provide Sky's analogue channels, the Astra 2 satellites (at 28.2 degrees east) carried the new digital services.

Advantages included a wider choice of 140 channels (including the near 'video-on-demand' of Sky Box Office which staggered broadcast of popular movies); a much-cleaner picture; digital stereo sound; and a distinctive EPG that was a model of clarity and ease-of-use. The BBC, Channel Four and Channel Five all had their place in the EPG, and for the first time those living where terrestrial reception was patchy could enjoy services that most of the UK took for granted – with the exception of ITV, which took nearly three years to arrive on the platform.

## Working together

The BBC had actually begun testing digital services via satellite in March 1998. Surprisingly, given the competition between the BBC and Sky, there was no animosity. 'We did a lot with Sky that was an extremely collaborative relationship in terms of launching our services,' I was told by the BBC R&D team's Phil Layton and Chris Nokes: 'It was something that the BBC wanted to do. Sky obviously wanted to launch their new platform. We worked out our own system architecture, which gave the BBC the control over its signals it desired. Sky was happy to agree to this.'

Free-to-air on terrestrial analogue TV these channels might have been, but on Sky Digital they were encrypted using secure Videoguard conditional-access technology, so the channels couldn't be viewed in European countries covered by the satellite footprint. BSkyB did offer a cheap viewing card for those who didn't want its pay-TV packages, hoping that users would upgrade later. New non-terrestrial digital BBC channels Choice (entertainment and children's programming, with some regional variations),

## See ya, Ceefax

Beeb sees red (button) at the turn of the millennium

While the Ceefax teletext service carried on until the very end of the digital switchover in 2012, its number was up once digital TV took hold. Twelve years earlier, after extensive trials, the BBC had launched its Red Button service, using a 'middleware' technology known as MHEG-5 that had been optimised for UK digital terrestrial TV. The Red Button (now upgraded to Red Button+ and available



across satellite, cable and terrestrial platforms) offered superior graphics and quicker page access than the blocky 1970s-tech system associated with analogue. Yet the content numbering system (page 100 for News, p300 for sports, etc) lives on...

Knowledge (documentaries) and News 24 also enticed viewers to the platform. And when ITV finally joined Sky Digital, so too did digital-only offerings like ITV2.

What's often forgotten now, twenty years later, is there was even more to the new platform. Sky Digital's proprietary OpenTV service brought a level of interactivity, and among the features offered were home shopping, banking, travel guides, showbiz, news, sports, simple games and e-mail. To provide a return path, the digibox incorporated a modem that plugged into a phone socket. The connection also facilitated the purchase of pay-per-view events like boxing matches.

By today's standards, this walled garden service (after a while replaced by Sky Active) was slow and cumbersome. But it captured the public's imagination at a time before home PCs and smart devices were widespread.

As did Sky Digital in general. Within 30 days of launch, it had over 100,000 users. By the middle of 2000, there were over 3.5m – something helped by Sky's eventual decision to offer free digiboxes and minidishes (the first customers had to stump up £160 for the equipment and installation). Adoption of digital became so strong that Sky could shut down its analogue service the following Autumn, thereby saving a fortune in Astra transponder rentals and protecting its pay-TV revenues against piracy.

## ONdigital switches on

Sky's platform was followed by its doomed terrestrial rival ONdigital, ironically based in the same building that had previously served as BSB's headquarters. Launched on November 15th 1998 by Ulrika Jonsson,

ONdigital was the public face of British Digital Broadcasting (BDB), a collaboration between the ITV companies Granada and Carlton. BSkyB was involved at an early phase, but forced to withdraw on competition grounds.

BDB won the licence to operate four commercial digital terrestrial multiplexes (named A, B, C and D) announced by the 1996 Broadcasting Act. The other two multiplexes were 'public service'; one (1) was gifted to the BBC, while the other (2) was shared between commercial terrestrial channels.

Sky Digital's original EPG (top) evolved through the following years





Following a period of testing, thirty-one channels – including the established terrestrial channels in digital form – were available at launch. Some, like FilmFour and Sky's movie and sports streams, were subscription; others, among them BBC Choice, BBC Parliament and ITV2, were free-to-air.

ONdigital-branded receivers were available from the likes of Nokia, Pace, Philips, Pioneer and Toshiba with prices around the £200 mark. All had the same user interface. You could also buy CRT TVs with ONdigital hardware built in. As with Sky Digital, subscribers were issued with smart cards to unlock the channels they had paid for (between £6.99 and £11.99 a month, depending on package).

The boxes supported the red button digital teletext service (see box out, left), and other digital TV features like audio descriptions and subtitles. To follow was a series of interactive services – onGames, onMail (e-mail), onRequest (pay-per-view) and onOffer (home shopping).

The most exciting feature was probably onNet, which appeared at the height of the dot-com bubble in 2000. It let ONdigital users view websites on their TV screens, albeit very slowly (note that the internal modem operated at a mere 2,400bps).

The platform's marketing strategy made much of the fact that there was no dish required – unlike Sky – and that self-installation was possible within 20 minutes. However, some viewers needed a new aerial because terrestrial digital signals were broadcast at much lower power levels than their analogue predecessors. As a result, breakup and blocking were frequent with some channels.

## Meddling with MPEG-2

Mind you, such unpleasanties weren't confined to terrestrial. Layton and Nokes revealed to *HCC* that the BBC's early MPEG-2 encoders – 'very large and quite noisy beasts' – specified constant bitrate (CBR) encoding at 5.8Mbps, as opposed to a variable bitrate system (VBR) that changed the data rate according to the nature of the incoming video system. As a result, busy visuals like dissolves, fine detail and camera pans could suffer noticeably from artefacts like blocking.

This was a problem with all nascent digital platforms, but was addressed as time went on: 'MPEG-2 at the time was relatively new,' say the Beeb duo. 'Every codec that gets launched starts off immature, and over time gets better through various optimisations – pre-processing to deal with noise, better use of coding tools and so on.'

In time, digital TV platforms would benefit from a sophisticated system known as statistical multiplexing, which intelligently juggles in real-time the multiplex's capacity between the program streams according to their complexity. A channel carrying, say, a football match would be allocated a higher data rate than the static documentary of a neighbouring channel.

Other problems related to ONdigital's customer service, bewildering package options, and the fact that – initially at least – there was no onscreen EPG.

Instead, subscribers had to make do with an old-tech alternative; they were mailed a monthly magazine containing channel schedules.

By Spring 1999 ONdigital had attracted 100,000 or so subscribers; an initial shortage of set-top boxes meant that the Christmas of 1998 was a missed opportunity. In comparison, Sky Digital had over three times as many users by this time. The chasm between the two platforms widened still further as many ONdigital users chose not to renew their subscriptions (known in the industry as 'churn').

A 'free box' measure to attract new subscribers appeared, but was subject to abuse. From high-street retailers, customers could collect pre-paid loan boxes if they agreed to subscribe. Many of these 'onPrepaid' boxes ended up on online auction sites; fraudulent customers were able to submit false contact details unchecked until ONdigital got wind of the problem. Just as seriously, the MediaGuard encryption technology was hacked, and pirate smart cards that could unlock all channels became available from dubious sources.

Having spent a fortune for UEFA Champions League football matches and ATP tennis – screened on the onSport pay-TV channels – ONdigital attempted to woo new customers by paying the Football League hundreds of millions of pounds to televise live Worthington Cup and Nationwide League matches for three years from the 2000-2001 season. In April 2001, the service rebranded to ITV Digital and the football matches were shown on an ITV-rebranded pay-TV sports channel. Similarly, onNet was rebranded ITV Active and an EPG finally introduced courtesy of a major new software rollout.

Then there was the memorable TV advertising campaign starring armchair-loving comedian Johnny Vegas and his knitted woollen Monkey.

By then, the end was nigh for ITV Digital. It was losing money, and customers were choosing Sky Digital or the cable services. Restructuring and trying to renegotiate expensive sports deals didn't help, and the offer of a free Monkey with every ITV Digital box failed to stem the tide, unsurprisingly.

Not even the spin of Carlton's PR guru David Cameron could postpone the inevitable, and at the end of March 2002, ITV Digital was placed under administration. A buyer could not be found, and the following month its ITC licence was revoked. The two ITV companies behind the service, Granada and Carlton, were to merge as a result of the collapse – also suffering were many of the football clubs reliant on ITV Digital money. Monkey and Johnny Vegas ended up flogging PG Tips...



ITV Digital tried to soften the blow of its channel subscription costs with the offer of a free cuddly toy

'ONdigital's most exciting feature was onNet, which let users view websites on their TV screens... very slowly'



## 'I must be travelling on now'

Out of the ashes of ITV Digital emerged Freeview in October 2002, a platform still going strong 16 years later. Many of the boxes used to receive this new service were actually ONdigital and ITV Digital hardware that hadn't been returned – as demanded – by the liquidators of the business.

In place of paid services came free-to-air content, and BBC Choice and Knowledge were replaced by BBC Three and BBC Four. Other broadcasters joined the platform, among them TopUpTV in 2004, which offered premium channels to those with the necessary CAM, smartcard and subscription.

A wide range of brands launched free-to-air set-top boxes. One of them – Pace's DTVA, nicknamed the 'soap on a rope' on account of its unusual design – sold for less than £100. A sensitivity boosting tech known as SetPal found its way into several of these Freeview receivers, including a VCR combo made by Daewoo, with the goal of more reliable reception.

Pace was responsible for another innovation in 2003. Named Twin, it was the first Freeview personal video recorder (PVR) with a whopping 20GB of storage capacity. Inside were two tuners, letting you watch one channel while recording another. PVRs were inevitable; the digits that carry a TV programme can be easily stored on a hard disk. By this time Sky Digital had already launched Sky+, its own PVR, following a brief collaboration with TiVo. As you were essentially watching the same stream that was broadcast, there was no loss of quality, and features like timeshifting and chasing playback were now possible. The dominance of the VCR was over.

The rest, as they say, is history. In the past two decades, digital TV has gone from strength to strength, and innovations have come thick and fast.

PVRs became widespread, and we began to see Freeview tuners built into DVD recorders and TVs, among them flatscreens that were gaining market share, then Blu-ray recorders too.

Hi-def arrived in 2006, with Sky and cable companies offering new services and hardware. They harnessed updates (DVB-S2 and DVB-C2)



**The free-to-air satellite platform Freesat (top) arrived in 2008, by which time Freeview was already six years old**

of the original DVB standards. Terrestrial HD (DVB-T2) followed later, offering 1,920 x 1,080 video encoded in H.264, more efficient than SD's MPEG-2 video. The choice of channels was initially limited, but the situation improved. Today, the Freeview HD platform offers 15 HD channels and 70 standard-def channels. All are available to users of BT's TV service, which employs broadband to deliver premium content like sports. Meanwhile Sky Digital and Virgin Media respectively offer more than 200 and 300 channels, both HD and SD, to their subscribers. 4K content can be accessed by Sky Q, BT TV and Virgin V6 set-top hardware, and the BBC has kicked off its own 4K HDR trials.

New satellite transponders, on the Astra 2 and adjacent Eurobird satellites, have a footprint that's more UK-focused, with minimal spillover into Europe. This allowed the main UK broadcasters to switch off their encryption. The result (launched in 2008) was Freesat, a satellite-delivered alternative to Freeview.

BBC's iPlayer took advantage of the expansion of broadband internet and growing acceptance of mobile devices to instigate the catch-up TV revolution, quickly followed by variants from ITV, Channel 4 and more. And terrestrial PVRs got cleverer too, with the retro EPG of Freeview Play. 3D broadcasts even made a brief appearance...

Throughout all this, the phased process of switching off analogue TV transmitters was completed. It began in October 2007 and finally finished five years later. Over this period the UK government offered help to those affected, even providing basic Freeview boxes to some viewers. The UHF band has since been reorganised so that spectrum can be resold to telecomms companies for broadband services. Some of the changes involved knocked out many legacy boxes, including the Pace DTVA and Twin, SetPal hardware and the ONdigital range.

## Looking to the future

For telly addicts, the digital TV story has been something of a rollercoaster. It's hard to imagine the next 20 years being equally as exciting, or a platform or technology rising and falling in as dramatic fashion as ONdigital. 4K and HDR are the current cutting-edge of course, to be followed by high frame rates and 8K, with broadband and on-demand delivery playing an increasing role. Will a cute cuddly toy be needed to sell these to the UK public? Time will tell ■

**The Sky+ PVR (which became Sky+HD) introduced its customers to time-shifting and simultaneous recording**





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# Digital Copy

Dolby Atmos has become a much bigger deal than **Mark Craven** ever imagined. Yet his celebratory mood is dampened by missing mixes on 1080p Blu-rays

**I WAS INTERESTED** to hear Bowers & Wilkins ruling out manufacture of any Dolby Atmos modules for its home theatre speaker ranges [see p9, *HCC* #290]. It's hard to argue with the company's reasoning (adding an upfiring increases the height of the loudspeaker baffle, and affects the tweeter performance that's taken many R&D hours to perfect), and B&W fans now know not to keep an eye out for any add-on Atmos enclosures. But its assertion that physical in-ceiling speakers are the best Atmos solution has got me thinking about the format in general.

When Dolby Atmos launched on Blu-ray in 2014, it was very much a cinematic endeavour and, I always assumed, one that would remain niche. With a sparse lineup of discs, it seemed destined to appeal to those with dedicated AV setups. The idea, therefore, of fitting two (or four) ceiling speakers didn't seem that unreasonable, even with upfiring units making an appearance.

## Atmos for all

Yet Dolby Atmos now is so much different. The tech has escaped the multiplex (and high-end domestic cinemas) and found new homes, from the sound system at nightclub Ministry of Sound to football broadcasts, music-only Blu-rays, TV dramas and console games. And with all that, there's been a growth in Atmos-enabled hardware, notably soundbars (everyone seemed to be showing one at IFA this month) and flatscreen TVs. Which is a good thing, as Netflix simply wouldn't bother providing Dolby Atmos streams for its original content if it knew only a tiny fraction of its subscriber base would be able to listen to them.

I've heard Dolby Atmos delivered by everything from Dolby's own in-house speaker system, through

KEF Reference speakers, Focal upfiring satellite models, and high-end and lower-cost soundbars. Naturally some of these experiences were more impressive than others, and you can probably guess which. But does that mean that Atmos from a soundbar setup is 'wrong' and a physical in-ceiling installation is 'right'?

Not for me. **If the Atmos experience is an improvement on what came before, it's worth saluting.** A single enclosure soundbar may struggle to provide tangible overhead sonics, but it can better define the sweeps and whirls of the front-stage audio and add a vertical dimension. And this is probably what the buyer of, say, Sony's HT-ZF9 three-channel soundbar will think, rather than wishing they'd hacked holes in their plasterboard to get an 'authentic' Atmos performance.

The proliferation of Atmos hardware is welcome as content grows across streaming, gaming and broadcast platforms. And the growth in non-disc content is also welcome as Blu-ray itself – the original Dolby Atmos carrier – is dropping the ball. We've highlighted previously in this magazine the removal of Atmos soundmixes from 1080p releases, with studios (cough, Sony Pictures, cough) opting to hold them over for 4K platters. It's as if the movie industry has decided that it does want Atmos to be elitist after all, so we end up with films on streaming/broadcast platforms having Atmos tracks while their Blu-ray counterparts don't.

Whether you run 7.1.4, 5.1.2 or an Atmos soundbar (I'm a fully signed-up member of the Dolby Atmos fan club, in all its shapes and sizes), a rethink to this nonsense policy would be appreciated ■

*Do you own a Dolby Atmos soundbar system?  
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

**Mark Craven** would love to hear Ministry of Sound's Dolby Atmos audio system, but is certain he'd be turned away for being too scruffy





# Film Fanatic

**Anton van Beek** reminisces about the heyday of the big-budget erotic thriller and wonders why Hollywood studios seem so scared of sex these days

**I'VE BEEN THINKING** a lot about Bruce Willis recently. Not, as you might assume, wondering why he's fallen so much from grace he's remaking *Death Wish*, but about his 1994 movie *Color of Night*, where a hitherto unseen part of the Willis anatomy made a surprise appearance. The subsequent publicity was used to pull in moviegoers looking to enjoy a steamy evening at their local multiplex.

In case you're one of those unfortunate souls who never had the pleasure of seeing this (Golden Raspberry) award-winner, *Color of Night* cast action star Willis as a psychiatrist who (1) goes colour blind after one of his patients jumps to her death from his office window, (2) visits an old friend who is murdered soon after, and (3) embarks on a sexually explicit relationship with a mysterious woman who has a secret link to many of the patients in his dead chum's therapy group. As you can see, you missed out on a real humdinger. Still, Scott Bakula and Lance Henriksen are also in it (fully clothed, in case you're wondering), so it's not all bad.

Anyway, back to the issue at hand. *Color of Night* was one of the wave of erotic thrillers that followed in the wake of Sharon Stone's leg-crossing antics in Paul Verhoeven's saucy 1992 box office hit *Basic Instinct*. **For a while it seemed impossible to watch a film at the cinema and not see an A-list actor stripping off** and indulging in all sorts of kinky fun and games. Who could forget Jeremy Irons canoodling with Juliette Binoche in 1992's *Damage*, or Willem Dafoe and Madonna playing with candles in 1993's *Body of Evidence*? I can't, and I wish I could.

The same period saw an avalanche of straight-to-video flicks starring one or other of the two Shannons (Tweed or Whirry), which filled the shelves of rental stores, and Channel 5's late-night schedules.

In the 1990s the erotic thriller was seriously big business. It's how you ended up with a major Hollywood studio paying Joe Eszterhas (writer of Sharon Stone flicks *Basic Instinct* and *Sliver*) a whopping \$1.5m for just a two-page outline for the 1995 film *Jade*.

## The Twilight effect

As bad as so many of these movies were, I still view them with a certain nostalgia. After all, I can't imagine a major studio doing anything similar today.

While television has become less and less prudish (thanks largely to the efforts of cable networks such as HBO), cinema has gone in the opposite direction. It's almost as if the pro-abstinence message at the heart of the *Twilight* movies has now infected the thinking of the whole of Hollywood. Meanwhile, the ongoing debate surrounding 'problematic' content (which seems to believe that ignoring something is better than confronting it head on and addressing it directly) has basically rendered the whole sub-genre taboo.

The closest the industry has come recently was the *Fifty Shades...* movies. Yet that terrible trilogy's insultingly passive female lead was a huge step back from the ferocious, strong-willed women that dominated the thrillers of the 1990s.

As with so many things to do with cinema these days, maybe our last hope lies with superheroes. DC recently published an adults-only comic that featured a naked Bruce Wayne (he'd even discarded his utility belt!). If DC was willing to take a similar risk with its struggling superhero movie universe, then maybe adults would have a comic book movie worth getting hot under the collar about ■

*What other movie genre is due a comeback?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

**Anton van Beek** realised the erotic thriller genre had hit the buffers when ex-footballer Stan Collymore was cast in *Basic Instinct 2*







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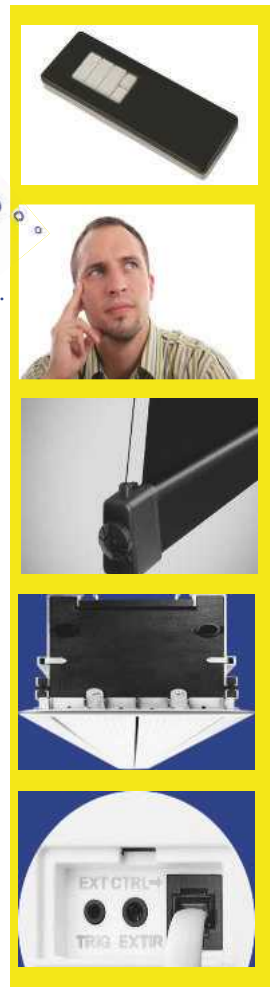
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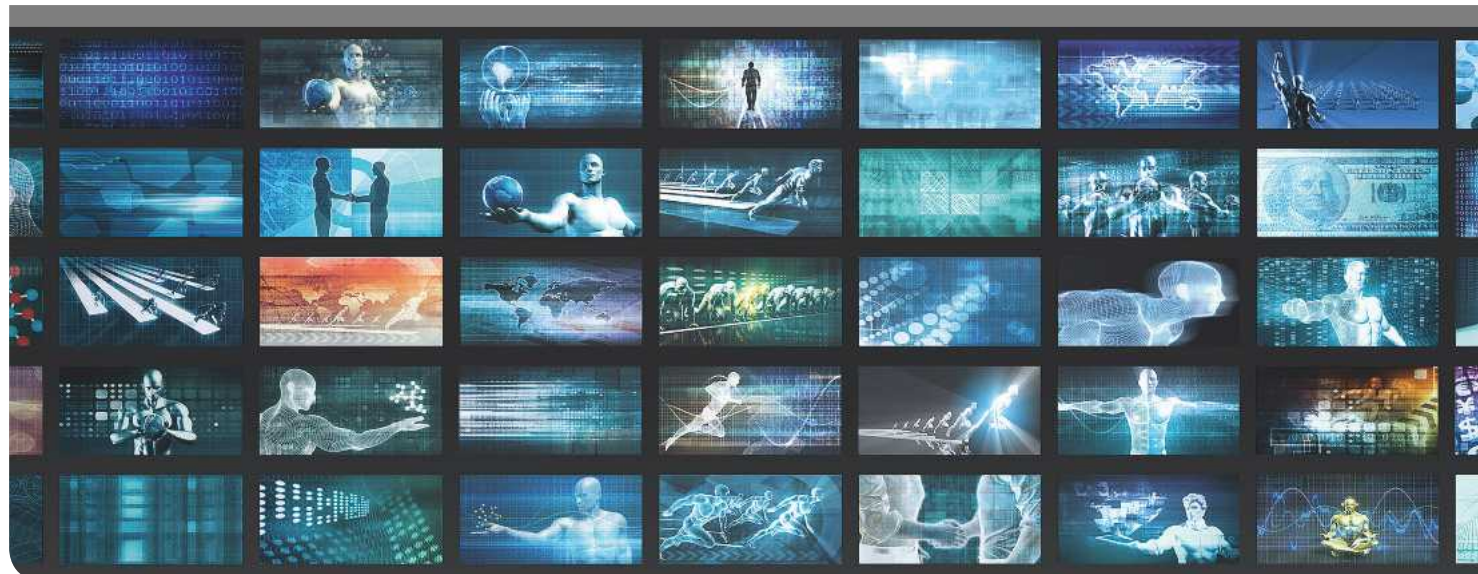
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# In The Mix

As social media lights up with reports of paid-for content disappearing from the Cloud, **Jon Thompson** is happy he's spent a lifetime avoiding digital platforms

**HEY KIDS! DO** you buy movies and TV shows digitally? Buy them on a disc and stop saying physical media is dead, that's my advice. Because your digital content, that you've paid your hard-earned cash for, can just evaporate and there's nothing you can do about it.

Let's say I bought a *Star Wars* tie-in book in 1977, forgot to read it then and suddenly decided to read it today. I could get it out of the attic, blow off the dust and start reading. But if I'd bought a film on a digital platform only a few weeks ago and decided to watch it tonight it might not be there. And not even an email to explain to me why it had been removed.

## The wrongs of rights

According to my HCC colleague John Archer, a man contacted him to ask why of the one hundred 4K titles he'd purchased via Apple's iTunes service, he now had only one title showing in his virtual collection. They had just vanished. To add insult to injury, some people are now reporting that they're being asked to buy titles that they've already bought, in an issue involving a movie studio renewing with another distributor and altering the titles' current rights.

That a studio can renew its contract with the provider, and titles that are no longer in the renewal will disappear, shows how stupid the online content business is.

Another scenario arises if the provider goes bankrupt or stops its service. **If that happened from a physical media company, I would still be able to play the disc** and it would probably go up in value as it would now be rare. A classic example of this is the Channel 4 TV series *Live from Abbey Road*. The Blu-ray master was physically lost so you could no longer nip to a

shop to get a copy of the Series 1 disc – if you look on eBay, you can see it selling for more than £500. Another example of why virtual media is not just virtually worthless – it is worthless.

If you are a collector and like having a library that you can watch at your leisure, then physical media is the only option. There is no value in your online collection, you can't sell it or loan it to your friends, and one day you might wake up and find it isn't there.

I'm looking forward to seeing how the technology world that has sold this utopia to the masses is going to spin this into a positive. If you ask me, it's a tall order. The only honest response would be, 'You don't actually own it!'

There is no physical back up when you are sold online movies, unless you are able to physically back them up yourself. The cloud storage world is the Wild West, and its rules and laws are complex; we are talking about multi-content, multi-national corporations and tech companies reaping huge profits and laughing all the way to the bank. They control so much of our day-to-day lives, yet the establishment seems scared to do anything to rein in their power.

I'm aware I probably sound paranoid, an analogue dinosaur raging against the digital future. Maybe I am. Maybe most people today don't actually care about whether they 'own' something or not. All I'll say is that if you buy a movie online you had better watch it as soon as possible, hoping someone somewhere won't pull the plug halfway through your viewing. Because while you're firing off emails to OmniCorp's customer service address, I'll be flicking through my paperback and catching up on the adventures of Luke, Han and Leia ■

*Do you buy movies via digital platforms?  
Let us know: email [letters@homecinemachoice.com](mailto:letters@homecinemachoice.com)*

When he's not in his screening room, **Jon Thompson** tweets about Hollywood gossip, movie-making and digital mastering at [@johnnyfocal](https://twitter.com/johnnyfocal)





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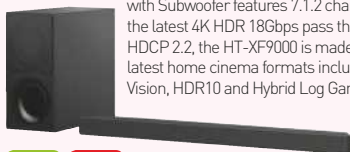


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# Feedback

Got an axe to grind? Need to comment on current tech? Want to share your knowledge with our readers? **Team HCC** is here to help

## Picking a new PJ

Hi guys. I've been a subscriber to *Home Cinema Choice* since the early days and enjoy my monthly read. I'm presently finishing some needed renovations in my house and it looks like I might have some cash left over to spend on upgrading some home cinema kit.

I've been thinking about a new projector for some time, my present model being a Sony VPL-HW40ES. I bought that particular model because it produced a good image and is a quiet runner. Low operating noise is pretty essential in a replacement as the projector is mounted almost over the seating area with a little over a metre above head height.

I'm thinking about either Epson's EH-TW9300 or a Sony VPL-VW260ES as a replacement. I know both produce a good image and note the Epson has a low running noise but am not sure of the Sony. Another advantage of the Epson is that there would be cash left over to replace my Yamaha RX-V677 AVR too. I'd be grateful for some advice – also as I'm not really familiar with the Sony, would you know of anywhere in the north of England I could get a demo of it. I've looked at the Sony website and it's not very helpful in that area.

Paul Kitching



The VPL-VW260ES is being replaced this Autumn

**John Archer replies:** When you're deciding between the Epson EH-TW9300 and Sony VPL-VW260ES you're essentially picking between better contrast and a cheaper price on the Epson, and sharper 'true' 4K images on the Sony. Running noise is agreeable on both, although the VPL-VW260ES does get louder when delivering HDR material.

If it was me, all things considered, I'd go for the Epson. It might not give you quite such a pristine 4K effect, but its black level performance is extremely impressive for a projector that performs better than most with HDR.

Your timing with this question, however, complicates the situation. Both Epson and

## Total Bayhem

Page 80 of last month's magazine: *A Quiet Place's* sound design was actually done by the same people who did *Transformers*. Just saying.  
Mark Perry

**Anton van Beek replies:** And there was me thinking I was making a good comparison between the two but, yes, you're right: Erik Aadahl and Ethan van der Ryn both worked on *A Quiet Place* and the *Transformers* franchise (as well as the likes of *Godzilla*, *World War Z* and *Kung Fu Panda 3*).

Maybe after throwing everything including the kitchen sink at *Transformers: The Last Knight* they had nothing left to chuck at *A Quiet Place*. Or, more likely, it just shows how much easier it is to craft superior soundmixes without Michael Bay bellowing 'Make it LOUDER!' in your ear every five minutes...



Michael Bay calling for quiet on the set of *Transformers: The Last Knight*



Sony announced at the recent IFA show that they're introducing new models.

Epson's new EH-TW9400 provides 100 Lumens more brightness than its predecessor while still claiming a huge dynamic contrast ratio of 1,200,000:1. Whether it runs as quietly as before remains to be seen.

The Sony VW270ES trickles down processing from the brand's previous high-end models, and from what I've seen at preview demonstrations promises a much improved performance over the VW260ES. But at £5,000, it doesn't really belong in the same category as the new Epson, which should come in around half the price. And that's a healthy saving that could give you an upgrade on your Yamaha AVR and more besides.

We're hoping to review both these models soon. The best bet with regards to your question about how to organise a demo of the Sony models is to contact the UK distributor Marata Vision ([www.marata.co.uk](http://www.marata.co.uk)).

## Goodbye to Elton John?

Hi. I was looking at the preview of the Panasonic UB9000 [HCC #288], which – along with Pioneer's up-and-coming models – is one of the only high-end players that will be available to purchase, but in your reviews you never mention if players will play the High-Fidelity Pure Audio Blu-ray format.

I think this is the best audio format out there; I have these discs and would want to make sure that the new player I buy has this capability. Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* on this format is fantastic.  
*Brian Langford*

**Mark Craven replies:** High-Fidelity Pure Audio Blu-ray may have a fancy name, but is still part of the standard Blu-ray specification, with discs offering their music-only wares in PCM, Dolby TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio flavours (up to 192kHz). So your collection will play in any new BD deck you choose to get. The appeal of the format, of course, lies in the quality of the masters used – *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*, released in 2014 to coincide with the album's 40th anniversary (but actually a year late, surely, as the album first came out in 1973), features a new remastered stereo mix, in addition to a 5.1 iteration. And keep hold of your discs too – with the 'format' mothballed since 2016, the releases are now worth quite a lot on the second-hand market.

## No trophy for this hunter on BD!

I recently bought the UHD version of *Predator* and have never been so disappointed, it starts off with a film logo in UHD and then cuts to this again when the film is about to start – only this time it is the grainiest version of a film that I have ever seen.

## ★ Star Letter...

### Give me the movie, hold the bonus bits

Just reading Anton's article in September's issue [*Film Fanatic*, HCC #289], and found it interesting, although it differs from my views of movies.

I have to admit, I don't read as much as I like, although *Hi-Fi Choice* and *Home Cinema Choice* are always a favourite. I find it much more fun to dive into the instant hit of a movie, or TV series, or music. Although the musings of alternate endings, etc, are interesting, personally I prefer to remain in the dark. I find movies can take me to a place away from day-to-day life, probably why I love sci-fi so much.

I remember watching *Apocalypse* when it was released. Wow, what a movie! I was totally drawn into the world it depicted. I was there watching the event unfold, the horror of the sacrifice, the exhilaration and intensity of the escape. After watching for what felt like five minutes, the movie was finished and I hadn't had enough, so I decided to watch the documentary about the making of the movie, something I rarely ever do, and that destroyed the illusion totally.

Seeing the actors' interviews, the characters in the movie were no longer what they were, and something was lost. Yes, I totally understand it is a movie, and how movies are made, but for that two-hours-twenty-minutes, I was removed from normality to another world, which is what a movie should be all about.

From then on, a staggering movie that it still is, *Apocalypse* had lost a little of the magic.

How do I know I loved a movie? I went to see *Gravity* in 3D, and totally forgot it was in 3D within minutes, once the debris hit. Wow. That's enjoyment – forgetting 4K, forgetting 3D, forgetting the sound, and just being lost in the illusion, being a child again.

Maybe I'm being silly, maybe most find it different, but I love escaping into a movie. I live reality 24/7 – escaping into another world, another life, however short, is what I love. I believe dissecting a movie, and finding faults and over analysing, means I

didn't enjoy it as much, even though it's good. It's the difference between the staggering *Ex Machina*, and the

disappointment of *Star Wars: Episode VII*. One draws you into an amazing story, the other just flogs a dead horse, regurgitates the old story with changes, skips over frequent major plot holes and just feels flat. I could complain about *Star Wars* for pages.

Silly though it may seem, I believe a story should be rock-solid and believable, a concept frequently lost. To know exactly how it was made, changed, should have been, the original story... no thanks. The point of a movie has been missed totally.

*Michael O'Grady*

**Mark Craven replies:** I completely agree with your verdict that a good movie is something that's easy to get caught up in. Escaping, as you say, from the 'real world'. It's when the stitching that's required to put a movie together is obvious that they fall apart, whether that's poor editing, poor VFX or just poor screenwriting.

However, I love quality extra features, and if I've really enjoyed a movie the first thing I'll do when the credits roll is search the Blu-ray for bonus bits. My disappointment comes not from the behind-the-scenes, illusion-killing info these provide, but from when there aren't any, or they're slapdash affairs.

I find a good commentary track or *Making of...* doc can add even more to my appreciation of a film. This is why I can often be found moaning that there's less effort being made in this area than there once was.

Star letter-writer Michael grabs himself a copy of the Academy Award-nominated animated feature *The Breadwinner* on Blu-ray, courtesy of StudioCanal. Executive produced by Angelina Jolie and made by Ireland's award-winning Cartoon Saloon animation studio, this powerful and inspirational film tells the story of a young girl growing up under the Taliban in Afghanistan. *The Breadwinner* is out now on DVD, Blu-ray and Digital Download.



If film companies are going to sell UHD films in this quality then I for one will stop buying them. How can they claim this as an upgrade when the Blu-ray in the same packet is much clearer and easier to watch? I feel as though I have been ripped off good and proper and would return it, only having bought it online from HMV it says that it doesn't take

returns unless faulty, which it is not – it is just the film company cashing in.

These companies complain that by buying ripped versions from people on online sites you run the risk of the quality not being what it should be. Yet they do it themselves.

I have a lot of standard DVD films that are of a far better quality than this. It's a

shame as it's a good film but I will not buy any more 'upgraded' old films any more unless I have seen proper reviews. I believe you should warn your readers as to how bad this version is. *David Littlehales*

**Mark Craven replies:** I actually reviewed the *Predator* 4K Blu-ray (and its two sequels) in our last issue and was pretty happy with the new presentation. So it's clear that we don't agree! It's a film with an interesting history on Blu-ray though.

In 2008, *Predator* made its hi-def debut on a disc using MPEG-2 encoding, a compression technique that was quickly replaced by MPEG-4 AVC and VC-1 technologies. This BD didn't exactly set jaws dropping, not least because it struggled to cope with grain prevalent in *Predator*'s 35mm photography. Two years later, Twentieth Century Fox returned with its Ultimate Hunter Blu-ray edition, which obviously used digital noise reduction to remove the movie's film grain, giving a smoother, cleaner appearance. It's this Blu-ray that you'll find in the *Predator* 4K release, alongside the new UHD platter.

I'm not surprised that some people will find the grain-free 1080p release preferable to the new UHD version, as the latter resurrects the movie's film grain. However, we now get into a debate about what's important when it comes to digital versions of film-based movies, and home media in general...

Anyone who watched *Predator* in a cinema in 1987 will have seen some film grain. It is, basically, how the film is meant to look – in the same way that if you look at the Mona Lisa, you'll spot the grain in the canvas. Using digital tools to remove this from a presentation is fine if a studio wants to do it, but it robs the image of fine details. The scene where Dutch (Arnold Schwarzenegger) is briefed before the mission (pictured) is particularly weird-looking. For the 4K release, Fox has evidently decided to put its DNR tools away, and I'm in favour.

That's not to say the amount of grain in this new image is entirely accurate either, and the opening 20th Century Fox logo does look particularly grain-infested, presumably



Don't look for film grain with *Predator* on Blu-ray

because it's a stock 'shot' that's been duplicated countless times. Also, the very nature of *Predator*'s location shoot and green/brown colour palette means it was never the most startling-looking movie in the first place.

### Roll on more 4K iPlayer

**Hi chaps – loving the mag and its content.**

**I'm writing in reference to Mark Craven's article about the BBC's 4K World Cup football coverage on iPlayer [Digital Copy, HCC #288].**

My partner and myself watched the games on an LG OLED55B7 TV with Sky fibre broadband which allegedly is 38Mbps but normally runs at 25-30Mbps. As soon as the iPlayer showed the HLG icon on the screen we were both blown away – no stuttering, juddering, freezing or digital artefacts.

It is the future of TV and has given a more profound experience than when watching my first HD program on Sky HD ten years ago on a 37in Panasonic plasma.

The BBC still has the FA Cup game between West Bromwich Albion and Southampton on loop in 4K HLG and that looks sweet.

Not sure why Mark is rather sniffy about the Beeb's efforts as it has served up an

exceptional Summer experience. Please Auntie – give us more as long as it's not *EastEnders* in 4K!

*Kevin*

**Mark Craven replies:** I suppose I may have come across as 'sniffy', but my personal experiences with the 4K World Cup trials weren't always as glitch-free as yours. The good news is that the trial was well subscribed, and the BBC now has a lot of feedback and data to help it develop 4K iPlayer further.

I certainly don't want anyone to think I'm against the Beeb investing in new technologies. On the contrary: I think it's brilliant that we have a national broadcaster given the scope to experiment, and to be a driving factor for AV improvements.

I remember once attending a 3D capture of a special Children in Need/*Strictly Come Dancing* broadcast – obviously, the BBC's 3D plans were eventually shelved, but you can only test the waters of new technology if you put on the swimming trunks in the first place. Since then we've reported on its surround sound radio broadcasts and binaural audio trials, and sung the praises of its filmed-in-4K natural history series (*Planet Earth II*, *Blue Planet II*).

I'd love to see more 4K HDR content from the BBC via iPlayer; not just the obvious live sport/music concerts, but drama series too. With so much of the output from Netflix and Amazon delivered in 4K, how much longer can it be before flagship BBC shows like *Bodyguard* are given the premium treatment? ■

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Head over to [www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions](http://www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions) to be in with a chance to win

### John Carpenter 4K Collector's Editions

Studiocanal is releasing new four-disc Collector's Editions of *The Fog*, *They Live* (both on sale October 29) and *Escape from New York* (on sale November 26). Each set includes restored 4K Ultra HD and Blu-ray versions of the film, plus a bonus disc of extras, the CD soundtrack and other goodies. Thanks to Studiocanal we have two sets of the three films to give away!

#### Question:

Who plays *Escape from New York*'s tough guy antihero Snake Plissken?

#### Answer:

- A) Jason Statham
- B) Kurt Russell
- C) Roddy Piper



### Gotti

John Travolta gives an electrifying performance as real-life New York mobster John Joseph Gotti in this new biopic directed by *Entourage*'s

Kevin Connelly. *Gotti* is out now on BD, DVD and Digital Download courtesy of Lionsgate Home Entertainment UK – and we have five *Gotti* Blu-rays to be won!

#### Question:

What is the name of John Travolta's wife, who stars alongside him in *Gotti*?

#### Answer:

- A) Kelly Brook
- B) Kelly Preston
- C) Kelly Macdonald



### Night of the Creeps

A deft mix of thrills, chills and chuckles, this 1986 cult favourite finds a college campus under attack from aliens whose victims come back as zombies. *Night of*

*the Creeps* makes its UK Blu-ray and DVD debut on October 8, via a Dual-Format Limited Edition from Eureka Entertainment. We have five copies to give away!

#### Question:

*Night of the Creeps* writer-director Fred Dekker co-wrote which recent sci-fi action sequel?

#### Answer:

- A) *Solo: A Star Wars Story*
- B) *The Predator*
- C) *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*



### Halloween

It's been four decades since Michael Myers first terrified cinema audiences in the seminal slasher *Halloween*. To celebrate, Lionsgate Home Entertainment UK

has released the film on 4K Ultra HD Blu-ray, alongside new DVD and Blu-ray editions – and we have five copies of the 4K platter up for grabs!

#### Question:

Which iconic 'scream queen' plays Laurie Strode in *Halloween*?

#### Answer:

- A) Jamie Lee Curtis
- B) Linda Blair
- C) Linnea Quigley

To enter any of the above competitions go to [www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions](http://www.homecinemachoice.com/competitions)

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# Certified: AV-Holic!

HCC reader **Phil** put his building skills to work on this loft conversion movie den, where smart lighting and a wall-dominating PJ screen catch the eye. Pull up a bean bag...



The room is used every day for gaming, films and TV



## Welcome to the AV-Holics Hall of Fame! Introduce yourself...

Hi, my name is Philip Bainbridge, and I'm aged 38.

I work as a builder.

## How long have you been into home cinema, and what was the first setup you had?

About 10 years now. I started out with a Sony STR-DA1200ES AV receiver, Mission Elegante E83 speaker setup and a 50in plasma TV from LG.

I have had numerous AV setups since then, including another loft conversion theatre and a cinema room downstairs with 150in

projector screen, which I have just destroyed to build a new one!

## When did you decide to build this new room?

About four months ago. It's a loft conversion. I had been meaning to do it for quite a while, just as a chill-out zone for myself and friends.

## What hardware is in your cinema system?

For visuals I have an Epson EH-TW6100 Full HD projector. Sources are Sony PlayStation 4 Pro, Sony PlayStation 3 and Nintendo NES consoles, and a home theatre PC (HTPC) with Intel i7 processor, 10TB HDD, GeForce GTX 1060 6GB graphics card (plus Logitech

K830 illuminating keyboard), wrapped in a Silverstone case.

The projector screen is 111in diagonal, which is as big as I could get it with the space I have. I made and screwed a timber frame to the wall, glued the screen fabric on to one corner of the frame and stretched it using the glue to stick it to the frame one bit at a time. I then made a border out of architrave and painted it black.

On the audio side I have a Yamaha Aventure RX-A3060 receiver (Dolby Atmos/DTS:X-compatible), which drives a 5.1.4 speaker system. All the speakers are from Q Acoustics. I have 3050 floorstanders for front left/right, a 3090c centre speaker (mounted on a slight angle above the projector screen as there's no space below it),



and the 3070s subwoofer. The six in-ceiling/in-wall models are the Q Install QI65s.

The room is controlled by a Logitech Harmony Elite remote and hub, integrated with Amazon Alexa voice control through an Amazon Echo speaker. This also controls my Philips Hue lighting.

### Did you get any help from professionals when fitting out the cinema?

I did all the work myself with my friend Chris Baker, apart from the plastering.

### What were the hardest parts of the build?

The worst parts were working in the eaves (the room is 7m by 5m and 2.3m high at its highest), on our backs, with all the dust and dirt. Plus getting all the kit up into the loft... and the spiders for Chris.

### What was the last thing you added to your system?

The Q Acoustics speakers are the newest addition to the setup. I had most of the other gear in a previous cinema room.

### Are you thinking of upgrading anything else?

I'm planning to add an Amazon Fire 8 tablet with Alexa capabilities. I could easily use

this as the system controller but I love everything about the Harmony remote – it's really easy to use and setup and the fact it turns everything on and off at the touch of a button is a godsend. Instead, I will be fixing the Fire 8 to one of the beams, and it will be mainly used for the lights and cameras.

### We love the Hue lighting – how many different bulbs/strips do you have?

There are eleven Hue GU10 colour spotlights and one two-metre strip in the ceiling. I'm still playing with the system, adding new scenes. It's pretty straightforward to setup.

### What's your favourite bit of kit and why?

I absolutely love the Q Acoustics speaker setup and think the Yamaha AV receiver is



Phil's friend Chris recommended the Q Acoustics speakers



The 111in PJ screen naturally had to be assembled in-room



The room's quirky dimensions mean low-slung seating is a must

the best I've had so far. My friend Chris had demo'd the Q Acoustics speakers. He put me onto them and I'm glad he did. I've had and heard a lot more expensive speaker setups but nothing as good as the Q Acoustics for this price range and above. They have a very authentic warm sound which is separated to perfection.

Before the Yamaha AVR I had a Pioneer SC-LX87 which blew when the bulb popped in my BenQ W1070 projector – neither of them worked again!

### Does the cinema room get a lot of use?

Ha ha! I'm in it constantly at the moment as there's a lot of work getting done downstairs in my other room!

### And what do your friends and family think of it?

They all love it, it's a cosy little room.



### What movies/discs do you use to show off your system?

*Need for Speed* is a good one, as it has definitely the best car sounds I've ever heard in a movie. *Blade Runner 2049* is another good one, as is *Ready Player One*.

### And what are your Top 5 favourite flicks?

*Interstellar*; both the *Blade Runner* movies; *The Dark Knight* collection; *Avatar*; *Star*

*Trek* (2009 reboot); *Ready Player One*; and *King Arthur Legend of the Sword* [that's actually 10 – Ed].

### Do you stream movies/TV from Netflix, Amazon, Sky, etc?

Yes, mainly Netflix. It's definitely not short of good shows; I have just finished watching Season 2 of *Ozark*. I also switch over to Amazon Prime to watch *Vikings* and *The Grand Tour*.

### Are you excited by 4K?

I have another cinema room in the making and for that I already have an Optoma UHD65 4K projector.

### Lastly: where did you buy the bean bags? They look comfy...

I purchased them from Dunelm Mill, which I found online. Luckily they had them in store near me ■

## Share your cinema system in the mag!

If you want to be in **HCC**, you'll need to send us some hi-res images of your cinema room. Here are a few tips...

1. Go big. Set your camera to take images at the largest possible size, and at the highest resolution. Don't worry about cropping or resizing – we will make them print-ready.
2. Get in focus. Make sure your photos are as sharp and clear as possible. If you have one, use a tripod, or place your camera on a flat, steady surface and take pictures on a delay. The sharper they are, the bigger we can print them.
3. Let some light in. While we tend to watch

- movies in the dark, our cinema systems look their best when they are lit. If you can shoot with natural daylight, do so. If your room doesn't get a lot of light (a garage conversion, for instance) then switch on whatever lights are fitted. Avoid using flash wherever possible.
4. Be thorough. Send photos of as much of the room as possible. Images of both the front and back of the room, the kit rack, speakers, seating, disc shelf, movie poster art... The more the merrier.

5. Don't be shy. Send a picture of yourself!
6. Show us more. Got pictures of your room before it was a cinema? Or snaps of work being done? We love to see these, too.

#### Now what?

Email your images to **letters@homecinemachoice.com** with the subject heading 'AV-Holic', and provide your answers to the relevant questions above – then we'll be in touch!



**AIRPULSE**

**A200**

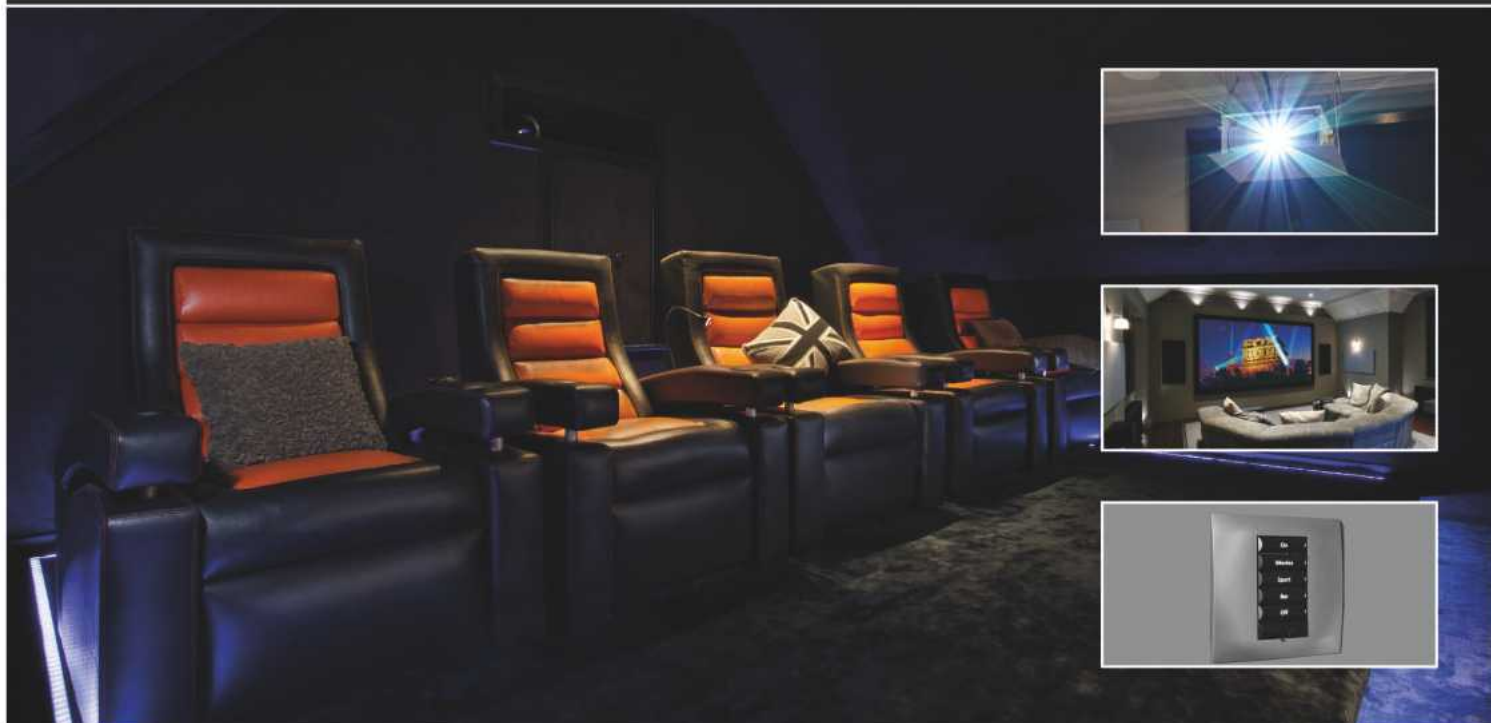
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# PLAYBACK

→ **SOFTWARE HIGHLIGHTS** **BAD BOYS I & II** Watcha gonna do when this 4K double-pack unleashes Atmos-powered Bayhem on you? **DEADPOOL 2** Merc with the Mouth's sequel is bigger and badder on UHD Blu-ray **THE WALKING DEAD: SEASON EIGHT** This time it's war! **JACK RYAN** Tom Clancy's iconic hero is Amazon's new streaming star **& MORE!**

## Could it be magic?

Mary and the Witch's Flower → Altitude → Region B BD

Can new Japanese animation house Studio Ponoc fill the enormous hole left by the demise of Studio Ghibli? Turn to p93 to find out as we take its hotly anticipated feature film debut for a spin on Blu-ray...

### HCC RATINGS KEY...

Outstanding	★★★★★
Above average	★★★★
Acceptable	★★★
Disappointing	★★
Dire	★

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



Gettin' jiggy wit it. Na na na  
na na na nana...

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# Bad Boys are badder than ever

Action duo's impressive Ultra HD Blu-ray makeover is a feast for your eyes and ears...



## → BAD BOYS I & II

1995's *Bad Boys* introduced the world to Michael Bay and helped make Will Smith a bona fide film star. It's a stylish, enjoyable, and at times rather violent crime caper that doesn't outstay its welcome.

2003's *Bad Boys II* is Michael Bay on steroids. The budget is bigger, the running time longer, the style way over-the-top, and the action more violent. It's also ridiculously entertaining and the very definition of a guilty pleasure.

**Picture:** *Bad Boys* benefits from an excellent 4K transfer of the original 35mm negative and looks the business. Presented in its correct 1.85:1 aspect ratio, the image is significantly more detailed than the included Blu-ray.

There's no Dolby Vision, but the HDR10 grading delivers strong highlights, deep blacks and plenty of contrast. The 4K transfer is clean and free of artefacts, resulting in a vibrant and punchy image that is easily the best the film has looked. The occasional soft shot is probably the result of production limitations on what was a relatively low-budget flick.

There's nothing low-budget about *Bad Boys II*, but the money's up there on the screen and this 4K disc renders every cent in style. Shot on Super 35 and finished using a 2K DI, there's a minor increase in detail compared to the included Blu-ray,

but it's the HDR grade that makes all the difference. Once again there's no Dolby Vision, but HDR10 still delivers the goods, with vibrant and saturated colours. The inky blacks are combined with superb shadow detail and radiant whites, resulting in exceptional dynamic range.

**Audio:** *Bad Boys* boasts a new Dolby Atmos mix that, while an improvement on the old DTS-HD MA track, doesn't quite match today's blockbuster titles. It's not the most subtle of mixes, lacking the finesse of modern sound design. Effects are moved around the front soundstage with precision, but rarely extend to the rears, while the overheads are under-utilised. Bass is fairly limited as well, resulting in explosions that lack impact.

*Bad Boys II* also gains a new Atmos mix, albeit a far more energetic and aggressive one. The surrounds are used extensively in scenes such as the 360-degree gunfight or the freeway chase, and the overhead channels get a thorough workout.

The low-end has the kind of tectonic impact you would expect from this type of big-budget outing, giving real weight to explosions and crashes. Lovely.

**Extras:** There are no new extras here, just the same goodies found on the film's original Full HD releases. Note that this US import bundles both titles into a single boxset; separate 4K releases are on sale in the UK. **SW**

## HCC VERDICT

### Bad Boys I & II

→ Sony Pictures → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £27 (US import)

**WE SAY:** These 4K discs ensure every moment of hi-octane action is seen in perfect detail and heard with maximum immersion.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



## Entebbe

Entertainment One → Region B BD  
£25



*Elite Squad* director José Padilha delivers an interesting if flawed thriller based around the terrorist hijacking

of Air France Flight 139 in 1976. While the performances and production design are generally excellent, the film comes unstuck when trying to unpick the story's politics. The Blu-ray itself is rather more successful thanks to cleanly delineated 2.40:1 Full HD visuals and a rich DTS-HD MA 5.1 track that's at its most potent when providing the backing to a modern dance performance. A seven-minute *Making of...* and two extra dance sequences are the only extras. **MC.**



## Show Dogs

Entertainment One → Region B BD  
£25



From *Paddington* to Pixar, we've repeatedly seen that it's possible to make a family movie that doesn't insult the

intelligence of its viewers, regardless of whether they are four or 40 years of age. Sadly, this talking animal take on *Miss Congeniality* goes the other way, mixing crass gags with lame pop culture references to dismal effect. This big pile of doggy-doo arrives on a barebones Blu-ray sporting a sharp and colourful 1.85:1 encode that looks nifty when it's not drawing attention to the cheap VFX. The energetic DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix is the real champ here, however. **AvB**



## Iceman

Bulldog Film Distribution  
All-region BD → £20



This prehistoric revenge movie follows the last survivor of a tribe hunting down the men responsible for killing his family. *Iceman* sticks to familiar story beats, but this actually works

in its favour; with the only dialogue spoken in an (unsubtitled) early Rhaetian language, it's the action that tells the story here. This barebones platter's Full HD visuals have a sharp, lived-in appearance, although the desaturated grading leaves some darker scenes looking washed out. And while the theatrical Atmos mix is absent, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 track that replaces it is extremely precise and involving. **AvB**



# The art of movie magic

Japan's newest animation powerhouse blossoms with a delightful debut

## → MARY AND THE WITCH'S FLOWER

Based on Mary Stewart's novel *The Little Broomstick*, this animated feature tells the story of Mary Smith, a young girl who chances upon a mysterious flower that grants her magical powers for a limited time. Whisked off to a school for witches by a magic broomstick, Mary initially impresses the teachers with her abilities. But when headmistress Madame Mumblechock learns about their source, she will stop at nothing to get her hands on the flower.

The spirit of Studio Ghibli lives on in this debut feature from Japanese animation house Studio Ponoc (founded by Ghibli veterans Hiromasa Yonebayashi and Yoshiaki Nishimura). Indeed, *Mary and the Witch's Flower* so perfectly captures the look and feel of Ghibli's output that it occasionally struggles to carve out its own identity.

However, even if it never conjures up the same sort of originality that marked out, say, Hayao Miyazaki's animated masterpieces, Studio Ponoc's debut feature does have that all-important 'toon magic, bringing its characters and settings to life in a way that is utterly fantastical and completely believable. *Mary and the Witch's Flower* is a delightful film that bodes very well for the future of Studio Ponoc – and we can't wait to see what animated delights it cooks up next.

**Picture:** *Mary and the Witch's Flower* looks gorgeous on Blu-ray thanks to the platter's bright, colourful and cleanly delineated AVC 1.85:1-framed 1080p encode. Image definition is excellent at all times, drawing attention to the precision of the hand-drawn



The English dub voice cast includes Kate Winslet and Jim Broadbent

character animation and the painterly nature of the backdrops. There's no trace of any technical imperfections with the transfer itself.

**Audio:** The disc offers separate encodes of the Japanese and English-language versions of the film (the difference in running time is purely down to the credits), each boasting a barnstorming DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. Use of the surrounds is expansive and movement through them utterly seamless, bass is impressively powerful, dialogue is well balanced and the score (based around a hammered dulcimer melody) oozes rich tonality.

**Extras:** The BD packs in a 40-minute Japanese TV special looking at the making of the film and its ties to Studio Ghibli; a half-hour chat with the filmmakers and pop band Sekai No Owari; press conference footage; a *Making of...* promo; an interview with the director and producer; nine trailers; and 12 TV spots (including some amusing product tie-ins). **AvB**



## HCC VERDICT

### Mary and the Witch's Flower

→ Altitude → Region B BD  
→ £18

**WE SAY:** This delightful animation conjures up stunning 1080p visuals and lossless 5.1 sonics on Blu-ray.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★





## Does bigger mean better?

The foul-mouthed runt of the *X-Men* universe is back with an epic sequel that doubles down on the gags and action

Deadpool is clearly a big fan of late 1980s John Cusack movies...

Both *Deadpool 3* and an *X-Force* spin-off film are in the works





## → DEADPOOL 2: SUPER DUPER \$@%!#& CUT

The first *Deadpool* gleefully tore the increasingly pompous world of comic book superhero movies to shreds with its no-holds-barred comedic assault on all things Marvel and DC. Having caught us by surprise first time around, though, can Mr Pool still feel fresh for a second outing?

Thankfully, he can. Propelled along at break-neck speed by another 'he IS Deadpool' turn by Ryan Reynolds, and another sharp script by the same writing team behind the original film, *Deadpool 2* is even more funny and entertainingly gross than the first one.

There's a meatier story this time round, too, as Deadpool comes up against Juggernaut, Cable (handled with panache by bad-guy supremo Josh Brolin) and, um, Firefist. Add in energetic fight scenes directed with verve and grim imagination by David 'John Wick' Leitch, and you've got a sequel more than good enough to probably guarantee that we'll see at least a couple more.

*Deadpool 2* hits home media with an extended 'Super Duper \$@%!#& Cut' accompanying the version shown in cinemas. This version chucks in around 15 minutes of, predominantly, extra fights too gruesome and jokes too close to the knuckle to make it into the original theatrical edit.

**Picture:** While a marginal step up from the Full HD Blu-ray and certainly not bad enough to spoil the fun, *Deadpool 2*'s HDR10 picture quality (there's no Dolby Vision presentation here) is slightly disappointing. The film only received a 2K digital intermediate, meaning we're looking here at an upscale. And it's an upscale that seldom if ever delivers that pristinely clean and ultra detailed, pixel-dense look associated with the finest 4K Blu-ray transfers.

Yes, Deadpool's suit looks a little more 'lived in' than it does on the Full HD platter's AVC 2.39:1 1080p encode. There's a more textured look to the gorgeous crayon-drawn closing credits, too, and faces are more detailed during close-ups. But the detail difference is relatively marginal.

Even the use of HDR delivers less consistent benefits than we would have expected from our experience with the first *Deadpool* 4K Blu-ray. With one or two notable exceptions there just doesn't seem to be as many high-contrast sequences with which the HDR grade can really shine. This is down to some extent to Leitch's liking for dramatically rich



Luck be a lady tonight: Zazie Beetz as Domino

colour schemes. These are more vivid on the 4K Blu-ray (thanks to the format's wider colour gamut) but they tend to limit the light range between the image's brightest and darkest areas.

**Audio:** While *Deadpool 2*'s 4K Blu-ray image only just about makes a compelling case for stepping up to it from the Full HD Blu-ray, its Dolby Atmos soundtrack is much more convincing. In fact, it's one of the very best next-gen audio mixes we've heard, leaving the DTS-HD MA 7.1 track housed on the set's 1080p Blu-rays sounding like Deadpool's baby legs by comparison (just watch the film...).

Bass extension is massive, squeezing every last drop of low-frequency grunt from your sub(s) without becoming baggy or overwhelming the rest of the mix. Height effects are regularly and aggressively used for both action exposition and ambient effects, and there's imaginative use of detailing (either subtle or aggressive) in pretty much every scene.

Transitions all around the soundstage are common and expertly steered, complementing the over-the-top visuals perfectly.

**Extras:** Aside from the fun inclusion of an extended cut of the film (granted its own 4K and 1080p discs), *Deadpool 2*'s extra features are dominated by a commentary track featuring Reynolds, Leitch and writers Rhett Reese and Paul Wernick. Happily everyone is in the room together rather than the track being stitched from separate sittings. The result is plenty of laughs and a light, easy-going tone – although there is still some enjoyable insight into the filmmaking process if you're paying attention.

The rest of the extras are a bit underwhelming. All found on the Full HD Blu-ray of the theatrical cut, they include two (dull as dishwater) deleted scenes, a gag reel that's less amusing than the actual film, and a very forgettable and by-the-numbers look at the film's cast.

Things improve a little with featurettes on the film's comic book 'Easter Eggs', director Leitch's influence on the film, some of the ad-libbed gags that didn't make the final film, and the fight scenes. Plus there are a few chuckles to be had during a brief monologue during make-up by Brolin, and a memorable but very short game of chess with Omega Red.

A decent enough selection, but not as consistently funny and varied as those delivered with the first *Deadpool*. **JA**



Gags and guns abound in this fourth-wall-breaking superhero sequel



Josh Brolin has signed on to play Cable in three more movies

### HCC VERDICT

#### *Deadpool 2: Super Duper \$@%!#& Cut*

→ Twentieth Century Fox → Ultra HD Blu-ray & All-region BD → £35

**WE SAY:** While the film is fun, this 4K outing is let down by uninspiring visuals and some hit-or-miss extras.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

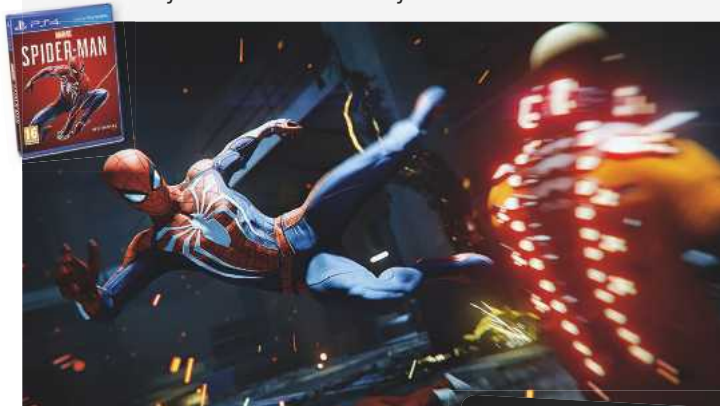
Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



## Arcade Action

Bigscreen home entertainment isn't just about movies anymore. **Rik Henderson** checks out a videogame vying for time on your home cinema system...



### Marvel's Spider-Man

Sony Interactive Entertainment → PS4 → £55

Sony pulled a masterstroke in securing the exclusive *Spider-Man* licence for the PS4. But that would count for nothing if the game produced was a stinker. Thankfully, it's not – and Xbox One owners will be left spitting feathers over their PS4-owning chums having sole access to one of the best superhero titles around.

In many ways *Marvel's Spider-Man* is reminiscent of *Batman: Arkham Asylum* and its sequels. But while those games were dark and foreboding, like their eponymous hero, Spidey's adventures are bright and colourful. There's also great humour throughout, thanks to Peter Parker's trademark wit. This isn't to say the story doesn't have its dark, at times even upsetting, moments, but there's a levity that delights and makes everything seem fun, and it's all brought to life by superb voice acting.



Equally superb is the rendering of New York City as your open playing field. It's massive, packed with collectibles, side tasks and secrets, and is a joy to swing around. Not only does the latter aspect improve combat in magical ways, but the thrill of just launching yourself around the city is almost worth the asking price alone.

It is intuitive and easy to grasp, much like the game as a whole. Combat, for example, ends up being a fast, free-flowing experience that you can customise to your own personal

preferences thanks to an expansive skill tree and Spidey's trademark gadgets. You can certainly tell that developer Insomniac borrowed elements from its brilliant *Ratchet & Clank* series.

The game is graphically impressive too. HDR is available on both the PS4 and PS4 Pro, which works wonderfully with both bright and dark sections in the game. Naturally, the Pro version ups the ante in resolution, albeit not native 4K but checkerboard.

We particularly like the musical score that always sits in the background. It makes for a cinematic experience and is suitably epic, matching the tone and tenor of the game superbly.

Sony has a winner on its hands here, one that will surely spark plenty of sequels. It is, truly, an amazing *Spider-Man*.



## The Breadwinner

Studiocanal → Region B BD  
£23



This harrowing yet inspirational tale of a young girl having to masquerade as a boy in war-torn Afghanistan is another resounding success for the Irish animation studio who gave us

2014's sublime *The Song of the Sea*. A powerful example of how the medium can make complex material more approachable for audiences of all ages, *The Breadwinner* arrives on Blu-ray with a beautifully rendered 2.40:1 1080p encode and an unexpectedly involving DTS-HD MA 5.1 soundtrack. A half-hour *Making of...* and filmmakers' commentary are the pick of the extras. **AvB**



## The Expanse: Season One

Dazzler Media → Region B BD  
£30



On the basis of this initial 10-episode run, *The Expanse* is shaping up to be the best sci-fi TV series since the *Battlestar Galactica* reboot. Based on the series of novels by James S.A.

Corey, this gritty series uses its futuristic setting of a human-colonised solar system as the backdrop for a gripping mix of space-going mystery and political wrangling. The often bleak storytelling is reflected in the show's cold, almost monochrome visuals, which are handled with aplomb by this three-disc BD release; the lossless 5.1 mixes are also agreeably immersive.

A reel of three deleted scenes is the sole bonus. **AvB**



## Rushmore

The Criterion Collection → Region B BD  
£28



Wes Anderson's sophomore film may have only hit the screen a couple of years after his debut feature (1996's *Bottle Rocket*), but it's a much more assured and satisfying piece

of cinema that feels far more akin to what would follow. This quirky comic-drama sports an extremely impressive 2.40:1 Full HD encode packed with fine details and warm colours, while the DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix makes more use of the surrounds than you may expect. The disc packs plenty of archival extras, including a chat-track and three fun MTV Movie Awards shorts. **AvB**







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# Country boys in the hood

Walter Hill's pulp thriller finally gets the chance to shine with this new Blu-ray

## → **TRESPASS**

Two Arkansas firemen searching an abandoned factory in inner city St. Louis for a hidden cache of stolen gold (William Saddler and Bill Paxton) find themselves up against a violent street gang in this contemporary spin on *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* from director Walter Hill and co-writers Bob Gale and Robert Zemeckis.

An underrated entry in Hill's filmography, *Trespass* is an impressively taut thriller that really makes the most out of its single derelict location and allows the filmmaker to craft some wonderfully kinetic action scenes. It's also extremely well cast. Saddler and Paxton exude just the right amount of sweaty desperation, while Ice-T and Ice Cube bring real gravitas and emotion to their roles, which elevate the characters beyond mere 'gangsta' stereotypes.

*Trespass* may be pure pulp cinema, but it once again shows that nobody does this sort of thing better than Walter Hill. As ludicrous as the story is when you actually stop to think about it, Hill's propulsive style of filmmaking ensures you won't get the chance to do so until after the final credits have rolled. And by then, you'll have enjoyed yourself enough to no longer care.

**Picture:** *Trespass* doesn't have the most auspicious track record when it comes to home entertainment releases. Previous VHS, Laserdisc and DVD releases were dominated by murky transfers that did the film's stylish photography no favours.

The good news here is that this Blu-ray's AVC 1.85:1-framed 1080p encode finally does away with all of that and lets the film's true colours shine



*Trespass gives you twice the Ice*

through. Pushing against the slightly uniform look that typified Universal productions of the early '90s, the imagery is now crisper and more refined, while the colour palette appears far more natural.

**Audio:** The original stereo soundmix is presented here as an LPCM 2.0 track. As limiting as this may appear, there's very good dynamic range and clear channel separation on offer. Ry Cooder's score and the rap music used throughout the movie are also well presented.

**Extras:** Bonus goodies kick off with a pair of audio commentaries from critics. The first focuses more on the careers of Ice-T and Ice Cube, while the second delivers a broader discussion of the film and its production. Also included are a trio of interviews with producer Neil Canton, actor William Saddler and co-writer Bob Gale, plus a booklet. Sadly, there's no trace of the deleted scenes or alternate endings alluded to in the chat-tracks. **AvB**



## HCC VERDICT

### *Trespass*

→ 101 Films Black Label

→ All-region BD & R2 DVD → £15

**WE SAY:** A surprisingly good AV presentation is joined by a fine selection of bonus features.

**Movie:** ★★★★★

**Picture:** ★★★★★

**Audio:** ★★★★★

**Extras:** ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

## Salvador

Eureka: The Masters of Cinema  
Region B BD & R2 DVD → £18



One of two films by Oliver Stone released in 1986 (the other being *Platoon*), this look at the Salvadoran Civil

War through the eyes of a degenerate photojournalist (James Woods) pulls no punches as it condemns the US government's willingness to turn a blind eye to atrocities committed by the country's military forces. *Salvador* makes a smooth transition to Blu-ray, with a pleasingly sharp and detailed 1.85:1 Full HD encode alongside a nicely balanced DTS-HD MA 5.1 remix. Worthy bonus bits include a chat-track and an hour-long Q+A that plays over the film. **MC**



## The Man from Mo'Wax: Ltd Ed.

BFI → Region B BD & R2 DVD  
£30



Even if you don't know anything about trip hop, this new documentary about Mo'Wax record label owner and Uncle

founder James Lavelle is a fascinating account of somebody who had incredible success at a young age, only for his ego to bring it all crashing down around him. While the 1.85:1 Full HD encode can only do so much with the copious archive footage, the DTS-HD MA 5.1 track does wonders for the ever-present music. Two audio commentaries, a bonus DVD of extended interviews and a glossy art/photo booklet are also included. **AvB**



## Tucker: The Man and His Dream

Lionsgate → Region B BD  
£25



Francis Ford Coppola's 1988 biopic of would-be automobile magnate Preston Tucker is no forgotten masterpiece.

It is, however, a well-told piece of wistful Capra-esque comic-drama that benefits from good performances across the board, sumptuous period dressing and beautiful photography – and those latter aspects really benefit from this Blu-ray's delightful AVC 2.40:1 1080p encode (based on a new 4K restoration). A Dolby TrueHD 5.1 remix provides lively support, while interesting extras include a chat-track and an archival promo film. **AvB**



## Porky's Revenge

88 Films → Region B BD  
£13



For a sex comedy, this second sequel to the iconic 1981 hit is oddly lacking in both naughty stuff and laughs. The

plot, for what it's worth, finds the Angel Beach school chums once again butting heads with illegal casino owner Porky as they try to get their basketball coach out from under his thumb. This fairly lifeless flick makes its UK Blu-ray debut with an overly soft and flat 1.85:1 Full HD encode. The Blu-ray's look back with critic Kim Newman at 1980s teen comedies, and a new interview with actress Wendy Feign, prove more enjoyable than the film they accompany. **AvB**







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Make the most of these zombies as you won't be seeing too many of them this season...



## Lurching toward the grave

Can the outbreak of war inject some much-needed excitement into this tired horror show?

### → **THE WALKING DEAD: THE COMPLETE EIGHTH SEASON**

When we last left former sheriff Rick Grimes (Andrew Lincoln) and his fellow survivors, he'd finally rallied the nearby communities of Hilltop and the Kingdom to aid the Alexandria safe-zone in its battle against the psychotic Negan (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) and his so-called Saviors.

This eighth season of the hit zombie apocalypse TV series makes good on the promise of that finale, devoting all 16 of its episodes to the war between the two forces. In principal this sounds pretty exciting – precisely the sort of exciting shot in the arm the show needed.

For the first episode at least it looks quite promising, but in tried-and-true *Walking Dead* style, the entire storyline is woefully over-stretched. Not even the decision to keep flitting back and forth between chronologies can stop it feeling incredibly repetitive. By the fourth shot of sweaty people with guns peering around a corner in a darkened corridor, or Rick looking at his reflection in a broken mirror (metaphor alert!), you'll want to fling your Blu-ray boxset out of a window.

There are still glimpses of the show that we all fell in love with. The cast are doing better work than the material arguably demands and there are more than a few shocks and surprises along the way. But the sooner *The Walking Dead* gets back to the basic setup of trying to build a new world in one that is now overrun with zombies (remember them? All too



often this season it feels like the showrunners don't), the sooner *The Walking Dead* can recapture its former glory. Maybe its upcoming ninth season will deliver the course correction it desperately needs.

**Picture:** When it comes to AV quality, this latest boxset is very much on a par with previous seasons of *The Walking Dead* on Blu-ray (barring Season Two, which foolishly tried to squeeze 13 episodes onto just two discs). Shot mainly on 16mm, the series opts for a deliberately rough and grainy style. The resulting 1.78:1 Full HD encodes don't exactly scream shiny hi-def perfection, but are still full of pleasing textures, not only in the details of the worn fabrics and materials on show, but in the refined grain pattern that swarms almost every frame.

**Audio:** *The Walking Dead*'s Dolby TrueHD 7.1 mixes are simply excellent. Ambient effects are ever-present around the soundstage and those few set-pieces involving the living dead make impactful use of the surround channels to place you in the heart of the action. Skirmishes with the Saviors result in an uptick in dynamics, as gunfire crackles and things invariably go boom, underpinned by plenty of low-end heft.

**Extras:** The only extras you'll find anywhere on the first five discs are production team commentaries on three of the episodes (*Monsters*, *Some Guy* and *Wrath*). A sixth Blu-ray houses two reels of *Inside the Walking Dead* and *The Making of The Walking Dead* episode-specific vignettes; two featurettes about departing characters; and a video exploring the season's main themes. **AvB**

### HCC VERDICT

#### **The Walking Dead: The Complete Eighth Season**

→ Entertainment One  
→ Region B BD → £45

**WE SAY:** The show may seem to be in a terminal decline, but this BD boxset is as good as ever.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



## American Horror Story: Cult

Twentieth Century Fox → Region B BD £35



Populist politics. Toxic masculinity. Gaslighting. Killer clowns. At first it seems like... *Cult* is little more than a mélange

of hot-button internet topics. It's a bit of a surprise then that it all pulls together to become the most cohesive season of *American Horror Story* in years. For whatever reason Fox has pared back this Full HD release, ditching some of the BD-Java menu functionality from previous seasons (even pop-up menus are absent) as well as any goodies beyond five promo spots. The AV quality of the episodes themselves is still first-rate. **AvB**



## Truth or Dare: Extended Cut

Universal Pictures → All-region BD £25



A game of truth or dare turns into a matter of life or death for those playing in this dismal fright flick from usually

reliable genre film factory Blumhouse. Contrived, idiotic and downright lazy in its willingness to embrace every cliché going, *Truth or Dare* isn't just a bad film, it's a boring one – which is something no horror title should ever be accused of. The total stinker arrives on BD with a warm 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode and expansive DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics. An audio commentary and two short featurettes are also included. **AvB**



## Death Line

Network → Region B BD £15



Director Gary Sherman's surprisingly grisly and unexpectedly tragic early '70s British horror finds commuters on

the London Underground falling prey to a cannibal killer. Network has sourced a 'brand-new HD restoration', and the film brushes up very well on Blu-ray, with its 1.85:1 transfer maintaining the grubby and grimy aesthetic without skimping on fine detail. Meanwhile, the LPCM 2.0 soundtrack does wonders for Wil Malone's sleazy score. This BD is lacking in extras compared to the recent US release, however, with just an interview, trailer and photo gallery on offer. **AvB**



## The Uninvited

The Criterion Collection → Region B BD £28



Believed to be the first motion picture to treat its ghostly subject matter seriously, this 1944 haunted house

flick established many of the tropes that audiences take for granted today. This does make a lot of it feel a little over-familiar, but the story is interesting enough to keep you engaged. Criterion Collection's handsome hi-def platter boasts a robust 1.37:1 black-and-white encode and a clean, if understandably restrained, LPCM mono soundtrack. A fascinating visual essay, two radio adaptations and a vintage trailer are also included. **AvB**



# All eyes on this excellent release

88 Films celebrates an underrated Italian filmmaker with its best Blu-ray package to date

## → EYEBALL

A sightseeing coach trip around Spain goes seriously off the rails when the tourists keep getting bumped off by a mysterious killer with a fondness for ocular injuries.

It's safe to say that this 1975 *giallo* from director Umberto Lenzi (whose original title translates as *Red Cats in a Glass Labyrinth*) isn't the smartest entry in the genre you'll ever see. The plot is as daft as they come and Lenzi's direction lacks the strong sense of style that is so often the *giallo* calling card.

*Eyeball* still has quite a bit going for it though, and will keep exploitation fans happy for an hour-and-a-half. For a film that revolves around people being stabbed in the eye, Lenzi orchestrates his set-pieces well enough to ensure that repetition doesn't set in. It's also a pacy and unpredictable affair that will have you guessing right to the end.

**Picture:** The latest of 88 Films' exclusive restorations may well be its best to date. Based on a 2K scan of the original 35mm negatives, this Blu-ray's 2.40:1-framed 1080p encode exhibits little in the way of damage beyond some minor horizontal scratches. The fact that *Eyeball* was shot on 2-perf Techniscope means the transfer is aggressively grainy, but there's still plenty of detail on display. Black levels are also pretty good, although shadow detail sometimes gets lost in the gloom.

**Audio:** The disc offers a choice of remastered DTS-HD Master Audio 2.0 Italian and English soundtracks. Both sound perfectly clean and clear,



with good dialogue reproduction and modest dynamics. Naturally, neither of the mixes will even come anywhere close to pushing your home cinema setup to its limits, but thanks to the work done on restoring them, they're as good as you could really hope for.

**Extras:** 88 Films has put together a terrific package here. As well as yet another entertaining chat-track from slasher fans The Hysteria Continues, there's also a new 16 minute interview with actress Martine Brochard, some then-and-now location comparison footage, three trailers, four art cards and a packed 40-page booklet.

However, the real star is *All Eyes on Lenzi: The Life and Times of the Exploitation Titan*. Running 84 minutes, this wonderful documentary shines a light on the career of the late filmmaker, with input from critics, actors and even the man himself. **AvB**



## HCC VERDICT

### Eyeball

→ 88 Films → Region B BD & R2 DVD → £16

**WE SAY:** A superb presentation of a fun slasher and a terrific celebration of director Umberto Lenzi.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★



# Settle in for the long haul

Three-hour anti-war drama celebrates its 40th anniversary with an impressive UHD release

## → THE DEER HUNTER: 40TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

This Oscar-winning epic, written and directed by Michael Cimino, was one of the first major films to directly address the Vietnam War, and is often hailed as a classic. It's certainly got an impressive cast (including Robert De Niro, Christopher Walken, Meryl Streep and John Cazale), is undeniably beautiful to look at, and has an iconic main theme.

But let's be honest: it's also dull, self-indulgent, and filled with interminable takes that seem to go on forever. *The Deer Hunter* is also disappointing as a war film, and has an ending that, when you think about it, is somewhat ludicrous. How long could someone last playing Russian roulette every night?

**Picture:** Studiocanal has delivered the goods with this '40th Anniversary' Ultra HD release. A 4K restoration of the original 35mm negative forms the basis of the 2.40:1 image, and very good it is too, highlighting the often breathtaking mountain vistas.

However, those brought up on a diet of modern digital productions should temper their expectations. A movie shot on '70s film stock using anamorphic lenses is never going to look pin-sharp, and there's also a healthy layer of grain. As is frequently the case, the HDR pass often emphasises the latter, but the increased dynamic range is applied sympathetically.

It's fair to say the film has never looked this good, with an image that boasts plenty of detail and is noticeably superior to the accompanying 1080p disc.



### HCC VERDICT

#### *The Deer Hunter:* 40th Anniversary Edition

→ Studiocanal → Ultra HD Blu-ray  
& Region B BD → £40

**WE SAY:** This excellent 4K release boasts a stellar picture, solid audio, and plenty of fan-pleasing extras.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

The wider gamut results in naturalistic colours that are realistically saturated, while the blacks are suitably deep. The use of HDR brings out more detail in the shadows, contrast is excellent and whites are clean and bright.

Despite not mentioning it on the packaging, the disc also includes Dolby Vision. Those with suitably equipped displays and players can enjoy the added benefits of dynamic metadata, but the HDR10 version remains impressive.

**Audio:** The sound doesn't get quite the same royal treatment, with a choice of a DTS-HD Master Audio 2.0 track or a 5.1 version based on the original six-track mix created for the film's 70mm outing.

The tracks reflect the filmmaker's original intentions, and the carefully constructed sound design is delivered with surprising fidelity. The limitations of the late '70s technology are apparent at times though, especially where bass is concerned.

Dialogue is clear, effects are well rendered and the wonderful main theme is as memorable as ever.

**Extras:** Studiocanal has produced an extras package that's sure to please even the most demanding fan.

This four-disc boxset includes the UHD BD, the 1080p platter, a second Blu-ray full of extras, and a soundtrack CD. There's also a 64-page booklet, the original 72-page script, and five collectible art cards.

There are no extras on the 4K disc, but the 1080p version includes two chat-tracks. The bonus disc is packed full of interviews, several of which are new, along with deleted and extended scenes. **SW**



# Cliques, croquet and carnage

Blackly comic high school satire dresses to impress on a remastered Blu-ray

## → HEATHERS

The likes of *The Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink* may have resulted in John Hughes being crowned the king of the high school comedy, but for a truly smart and unabashed exploration of the brutality of teen life Michael Lehmann's *Heathers* can't be beaten.

Winona Ryder stars as Veronica, friend of the three Heathers (Kim Walker, Shannon Doherty and Lisanne Falk) who rule the roost at Westerburg High. Veronica's growing disillusionment with the Heathers takes a fatal turn when she falls for brooding transfer student J.D. (Christian Slater). But as the body count rises, Veronica realises that J.D.'s plan goes a lot further than faking a few teenage suicides.

As bleak as this all may sound, *Heathers* maintains a blisteringly sharp wit throughout; one full of waspish and endlessly quotable one-liners. Combined with excellent performances from the film's youthful cast, it all helps paper over the few elements of the story that don't quite hang together as well as they should.

It may be 30 years old now, but *Heathers* still feels incredibly fresh and relevant.

**Picture:** The movie made its rather disappointing Blu-ray debut in the US the best part of a decade ago, courtesy of label Anchor Bay. For this UK release Arrow Video has produced a brand-new restoration based on a 4K scan of the 35mm camera negatives.

The colour palette can sometimes run a little hot in places (the reds during Chapter 16's pep rally appear particularly pumped up). The overall image



quality is excellent, however. Stability, sharpness and detailing all take a massive leap forward over the old US platter, while the finely resolved grain results in a more film-like appearance.

**Audio:** The disc offers up a choice of lossless mono, stereo and 5.1 soundtracks (the first two as LPCM, the latter as DTS-HD Master Audio). Given the nature of the original elements, none sound particularly expansive, although the added bass presence of the 5.1 track brings a little more heft to the audio.

**Extras:** An impressive batch of new and archival extras includes a chat-track; interviews; a *Making of...* featurette; an appreciation by comedian John Ross Bowie; and Michael Lehmann's 1985 student film *The Beaver Gets a Boner*. But as Arrow has been forced to drop the 2001 *Swatch Dogs and Diet Coke Heads* featurette, there's no longer any input from either Ryder or Slater. **AvB**



## HCC VERDICT

### Heathers

→ Arrow Video → Region B BD  
→ £20

**WE SAY:** A gorgeous 4K restoration and generous extras get the best out of this '80s cult classic.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

Extras: ★★★★★

**OVERALL:** ★★★★★

## The Nun

Studiocanal → Region B BD  
£23



Not the recent horror hit of the same name, this 1966 French drama stars New Wave icon Anna Karina as a young

woman forced to become a nun by her family, and charts the ordeals she faces while struggling with a life she never wanted. The new restoration of Jacques Rivette's moving melodrama that underpins this Blu-ray is technically sound, with good detailing and grain retention, although the colour palette has a clear blue push for much of its running time. An enjoyable half-hour featurette deals with the controversy that surrounded the film's original release. **MC**



## The Odessa File

Indicator → All-region BD  
£16



Based on Frederick Forsyth's novel of the same name, this 1974 thriller stars Jon Voight as a reporter in 1960s

West Germany whose investigation into the whereabouts of missing Nazi war criminals is hampered by a secretive organisation. Thankfully, boutique label Indicator hasn't thrown *The Odessa File* under a train with this Blu-ray release. In addition to a pleasingly organic 2.40:1 1080p encode and restored LPCM mono audio, it offers up lengthy audio-only Q&As with director Ronald Neame and cinematographer Oswald Morris, plus plenty of other choice goodies. **AvB**



## Ministry of Fear

Indicator → Region B BD  
£16



Author Graham Greene may not have liked Fritz Lang's 1944 adaptation of his novel of the same name, but it's an enjoyably odd wartime thriller that benefits from Ray Milland's lead performance as the wronged man pursued by agents for both sides, and has some unexpectedly surreal touches. While this good-looking UK Blu-ray is based on the same 2K remaster Criterion used for its 2013 US release, it boasts superior extras including an 80-minute interview with Lang (audio-only), commentary from film historian Neil Sinyard on selected scenes, and a pair of informative video essays. **AvB**



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boasts superior extras including an 80-minute interview with Lang (audio-only), commentary from film historian Neil Sinyard on selected scenes, and a pair of informative video essays. **AvB**

# Amazon Prime's Jack-of-all-trades

Smallscreen reboot of Tom Clancy's iconic hero offers plenty of thrills, but not many surprises

## → JACK RYAN: SEASON ONE

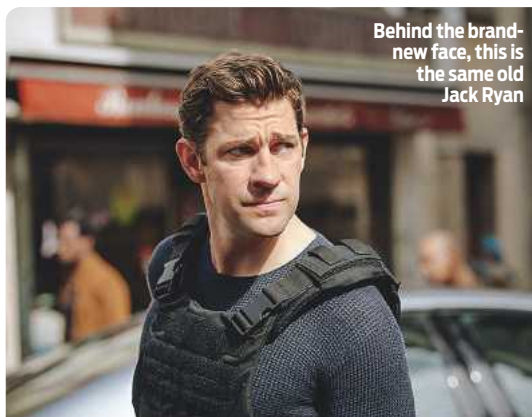
Take a time out Jack Bauer and calm down Carrie Mathison, there's a new American hero in town, and this one's really tall. Actually, there's nothing new at all about Jack Ryan. He already has an impressive movie resume.

Much like Troy McClure, you might remember him from *The Hunt for the Red October*, *Patriot Games*, *Clear and Present Danger* (all good enough) and *The Sum of all Fears* and *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit* (not so much). This TV iteration feels like a worthwhile return, thanks mainly to the casting of John 'A Quiet Place' Krasinski as Tom Clancy's titular CIA agent.

Unlike Alec Baldwin, Harrison Ford, Ben Affleck or Chris Pine before him, Krasinski's Ryan convinces as an analyst who would rather trade his marine training for a quiet life in (ahem) *The Office*. The addition of Wendell Pierce as Ryan's surly boss is a similarly good casting call. Meanwhile, production values are high and action scenes well staged.

This debut season's Islamic terrorist story is predictably topical and surprisingly one-note. There's an escalating threat, with no swerves or surprises. Character notes are written in crayon: Syrian militant Suleiman is empathetic because he loves his brother; Ryan is sharp because he answers all the questions on *Jeopardy* in a heartbeat. And yet, while it may lack the gritty tonality of *Homeland*, or the propulsive drama of *24*, by the end of each episode you'll still be gripped enough to let the next instalment roll.

**Picture:** *Jack Ryan* is available in resolutions up to 4K, with either HDR10 or Dolby Vision depending



Behind the brand-new face, this is the same old Jack Ryan



on available hardware. Cinematic in composition, with plenty of detail, it's a fine-looking show. Colour grading is more televisual than movie, though. Interiors are brightly lit, while daylight exteriors have pin-sharp detail. When it does move to night, the action's not difficult to follow.

**Audio:** Bang, rat-a-tat-tat, pop-pop-pop, KA-BOOM! This first arc is not short on firefights and explosive action (there are a lot of explosions), all of which play well with home cinema gear. Expect dramatic steerage and judicious use of the LFE channel – your subwoofer will definitely get a workout. Dialogue, while clunky, is always clear. The soundmix is available as either 5.1 or Dolby Atmos delivered in a Dolby Digital+ container.

The latter is noteworthy only because that Atmos height channel really doesn't get much to do. *Jack Ryan* actually has a very conventional multichannel TV mix, although is none the worse for it. **SM**

## HCC VERDICT

### Jack Ryan: Season One

→ Amazon Prime

**WE SAY:** A solid smallscreen debut for the character, but there's still room for improvement.

Movie: ★★★★★

Picture: ★★★★★

Audio: ★★★★★

OVERALL: ★★★★★



You're more likely to know Dave Bautista from his portrayal of Drax the Destroyer in the Marvel Cinematic Universe

## → FINAL SCORE

### → Sky Cinema Premiere (Altitude)

A gang of Russian terrorists infiltrates West Ham's final game at the Boleyn Ground (a European Cup semi-final, oddly...) and plan to blow up the stadium. Standing in their way in this brazen *Die Hard* ripoff is ex-US Army grunt Mike Knox (Dave Bautista), who just happens to be at the game, fulfilling 'Uncle Mike' duties to the daughter of a fallen UK comrade.

Bautista is another actor making the transition from wrestling to acting, and while he lacks The Rock's out-and-out charisma, he manages to bring a touch of humanity and humour to what's a fairly underwritten role. Ray Stevenson menaces as the murderous villain, Amit Shah offers good support as an unfortunate steward-turned-sidekick, and Pierce Brosnan pops up briefly sporting a strange Russian/Irish accent.

Launched on Sky Cinema (in 4K) simultaneously with a theatrical outing, *Final Score* has all the hallmarks of a duff, meat-headed actioner, yet

director Scott Mann has an eye for a smart sequence, and two set-pieces here – a thrilling fight inside the stadium kitchen, and a motorbike chase around the Boleyn Ground concourses – are thigh-slappingly good. Shooting on location at the actual stadium (in advance of its demolition in late 2016) works wonders for the film's sense of scale, and there are generally high production values throughout, bar some obvious green-screened FX moments.

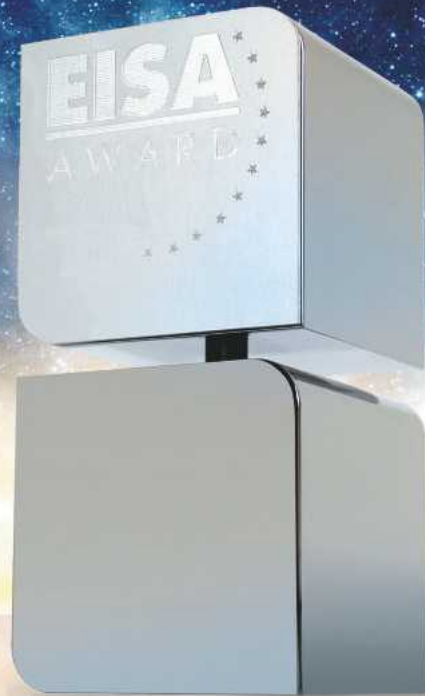
The soccer/football gags are tiresome for a UK audience, but subtler digs at West Ham Utd raise a smile. As does the whole movie in general; it's fast-paced, energetic and heaps of fun.

*Final Score*'s sound design majors on percussive gunfire and enveloping crowd noise, with just a few moments of hard-to-discern dialogue. A 2.40:1-framing of the digital photography adds to its cinematic charm. **MC**





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Collecting...

# Oliver Stone

Fresh from revisiting *Salvador* on Blu-ray, **Team HCC** trawls through Oliver Stone's forty-year career as writer, director and provocateur to highlight ten more of his movies on DVD/Blu-ray

## PLATOON

Stone's own Vietnam war experiences run through this superb 1986 drama that's firmly in the 'war is hell' camp, with Charlie Sheen acting as his wide-eyed narrator witnessing blood, bullets and murderous rivalry in the jungle. Stone's first major picture where he both wrote and directed (he'd previously performed double duties on the Michael Caine horror flick *The Hand*), this ferocious labour of love won him the Academy Award for Best Director.

**Get it:** While the 2011 25th Anniversary Blu-ray is solid and carries a nice selection of extras (including twin commentary tracks), a new release last month from US label Shout! Factory is based on a Stone-approved 4K remaster. It's limited to 10,000 copies, though, so you might have to be quick to grab it.



## WALL STREET

'Greed is good' bellowed an entire generation of stockbrokers who completely missed the point of Stone's well-regarded 1987 drama about a junior Wall Street trader (Charlie Sheen), taken under the wing of unscrupulous corporate raider Gordon Gekko (an Oscar-winning turn from Michael Douglas).

**Get it:** Fox's original *Wall Street* Blu-ray is a mediocre affair, so if you can play Region A discs you'd be better off going for the 2012 Signature Series US reissue, which is based on a 4K remaster.



## NIXON

Anthony Hopkins gives an astonishing performance as the 37th President of the United States in Oliver Stone's three-hour 1995 biopic. While dismissed by Nixon's family as 'reprehensible', this underrated film is a surprisingly empathetic affair that transforms Tricky Dicky's life into something approaching a Shakespearean saga.

**Get it:** *Nixon* has yet to see the light of day on Blu-ray in the UK, but Disney put out an All-region two-disc 'Election Year Edition' in the US back in 2008.



## NATURAL BORN KILLERS

A script from Quentin Tarantino provides the backbone for this controversial 1994 movie that saw Stone pushing his filmmaking into new stylistic directions and upsetting censors. It's all a bit of a mess, but still mesmerizing.

**Get it:** *NBK* was delayed a video release by its distributors (not the BBFC) until 2001 due to ongoing controversy. That version was the cut-down theatrical release – an uncut version followed in 2002, and is now available on a 'Director's Cut' Blu-ray.



## THE DOORS

Val Kilmer does fine work filling the leather trousers of legendary The Doors vocalist Jim Morrison in this well-staged biopic from 1991. Stone mixes up the expected sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll antics with dollops of Native American mysticism, but doesn't forget to let the all-important music shine.

**Get it:** The 2011 Blu-ray (Twentieth Anniversary Edition) from Optimum Releasing (now Studiocanal) bundles a pair of hour-long documentaries and features 7.1 DTS-HD MA sonics.





## SCARFACE

Oliver Stone scripted this 1983 crime classic (eventually directed by Brian De Palma), reimagining the 1932 original as a Florida-set modern day tale of Cuban immigrants and the cocaine trade. Al Pacino gives the performance of a lifetime as rags-to-riches hoodlum Tony Montana, De Palma lays on the glitzy visuals, and Stone's script expertly moves from street-level violence to epic tragedy.

**Get it:** Seemingly re-released every year on BD since debuting in 2011. All versions are based on the same good, but DNR'd, master. Time for a 4K revisit, Universal.

TOP  
PICK



## JFK

Even if you don't hold truck with Stone's conspiracy theories, this 1991 drama following the investigation by District Attorney Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) into the assassination of President Kennedy is a three-hour thrill ride, with Stone partnering an excellent ensemble cast with a dizzying narrative that moves from the corridors of the White House to the criminal underworld of the Deep South.

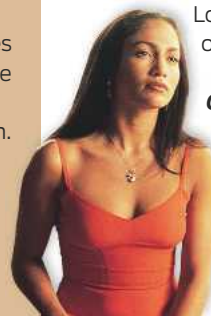
**Get it:** Released in 'Director's Cut' form on UK BD in 2013; a US 'Ultimate Collector's Edition' adds tons of extras.



## U TURN

This wickedly fun 1997 neo-noir/Western finds Stone cutting loose after a decade of political/social commentary, but continuing to experiment with his visual style. Sean Penn stars as the cash-strapped man caught in the web of smalltown conniver Jennifer Lopez. Will he get out alive?

**Get it:** Unavailable on UK Blu-ray and a Twilight Time limited edition release in the US, so DVD is currently your best bet.



## SAVAGES

Oliver Stone's career post-2000 has been patchy at best, but in 2012 he took time out from interviewing dictators and despots to thrill audiences with this lurid crime thriller about two California pot growers (and their shared girlfriend) whose dealings with a Mexican cartel spiral out of control. Wild and violent, the visually dazzling *Savages* is a cracking film that more than lives up to its title.

**Get it:** Universal's 'Uncut and Extended' UK Blu-ray sports a vibrant 2.40:1 encode, vigorous DTS-HD MA 5.1 sonics and a pair of fascinating chat-tracks.

## ALEXANDER

Stone's epic 2004 account of the life of Alexander the Great (Colin Farrell) has more than its fair share of flaws. However, for anyone with an interest in the filmmaking process, the fact Stone has returned to it again and again makes watching its different incarnations an intriguing study of a director trying to find the film he wanted to make, among the reels of footage that was shot.

**Get it:** While only the 2004 'Theatrical Cut' is available on BD in the UK, both 2007's 'The Final Cut' (hmm...) and 2014's 'Ultimate Cut' surfaced on Blu-ray in other territories, including the US, Germany, Australia and France. The last of those is the only one with a BD set collecting the three cuts – but it has forced French subtitles on the 'Ultimate Cut' and drops all commentaries. So far, Stone's 2005 'Director's Cut' has only ever been released on DVD.



Have we missed one of your favourite Oliver Stone movies?  
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Outstanding	★★★★★
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Acceptable	★★★☆☆
Disappointing	★★☆☆☆
Dire	★☆☆☆☆

All prices quoted are approximate and may have changed



## TOP 15 Televisions

01

**Samsung QE65Q9FN** → £3,000 ★★★★★

Revised QLED technology and the implementation of a local dimming backlight reap astonishing picture quality rewards with this bright, colourful 4K HDR hero. Great usability and smart platform, too. *HCC #285*

## TOP 5 Blu-ray movies

**Pacific Rim: Uprising**

There's little originality in this mechs vs kaiju sequel, but it certainly delivers the goods when it comes to eye-opening set-pieces and heavyweight cinema sound. The best of the extras is a chat track. *HCC #288*

★★★★★

**A Quiet Place [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

The finely crafted Atmos track makes this disc home cinema demo fodder – the movie itself is a tense, post-apocalyptic horror with Emily Blunt in fine form in the lead role. *HCC #289*

★★★★★

**Ready Player One [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

Steven Spielberg's most visually spectacular film since *War of the Worlds* benefits from a 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) encode and immersive Dolby Atmos soundmix. *HCC #290*

★★★★★

**Isle of Dogs**

Stop-motion animation from Wes Anderson with an excellent voice cast and wonderfully surreal story. The BD offers gorgeous 1080p visuals and an effective DTS-HD MA 5.1 mix, but extras are sparse. *HCC #290*

★★★★★

**Avengers: Infinity War [Ultra HD Blu-ray]**

While loaded with characters and narrative threads, this Marvel flick pulls it all off, and arrives on 4K BD (US import) with good – but not great – picture and sound. *HCC #290*

★★★★★



02



NEW ENTRY

### Philips 65OLED903 → £3,500 ★★★★★

Take impressive audio from a B&W-designed speaker array, OLED-delivered 4K HDR visuals that outshine the competition, and add a sprinkle of Ambilight, and you get the most exciting display Philips has ever released. HCC #290



03



NEW ENTRY

### Panasonic TX-65FZ852 → £3,000 ★★★★★

4K HDR OLED (with HDR10+ support) that offers subtlety and refinement in spades (particularly with colour presentation and near-black handling), making up for a slight lack of dynamic punch. Unobtrusive design, too. HCC #290



04



### Samsung QE55Q9F

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Save a chunk of money by shopping for Samsung's flagship QLED TV at 55in size. Again, the 4K HDR performance here is superb, with efficient light control, excellent native brightness and rich, wide colour. HCC #286

05



### LG OLED65E8

→ £4,300 ★★★★★

This Dolby Vision-enabled OLED boosts image quality on last year's E7 (it's brighter, for one thing), although its Atmos sonics are a tad less impressive. Tidy design and excellent UI. HCC #287

06



### Sony KD-65AF8

→ £3,300 ★★★★★

Sony revises its OLED line with a new model offering a more conventional design than last year's A1. Acoustic Surface speaker technology and 4K visuals impress. Decodes Dolby Atmos bitstreams. HCC #288

07



### Sony KD-55XF9005

→ £1,700 ★★★★★

Impressive backlighting, dynamic HDR images and top-quality motion processing are the major draws of this mid-tier Bravia. Android OS still needs improvement, though. HCC #285

08



### Samsung UE49MU7000

→ £750 ★★★★★

Not one of Samsung's top-flight TVs, but a cracking mid-range 49in model that presents 4K and HD material with bright, rich colours and stable blacks. Good choice for an affordable setup. HCC #277

09



### Hisense H75U9A

→ £3,500 ★★★★★

This 75in LED is the brightest display we've seen, yielding benefits with HDR content, while backlit illumination aids black levels. Sharpness and colour delivery are less impressive, but the price/size ratio is good. HCC #289

10



### Panasonic TX-65EX750

→ £1,500 ★★★★★

A (surprise!) 3D-capable LED screen that offers well-controlled backlighting, pleasing 4K clarity and good HD upscaling. Not the brightest around, and some colour inconsistencies. HCC #279

11



### Loewe Bild 3.55

→ £2,800 ★★★★★

Loewe's entry-level 55in OLED TV offers an artful fusion of design and performance (with decent sonics). Not the best selection of integrated smarts, though, and some rivals are cheaper. HCC #283

12



### Hisense 55U7A

→ £800 ★★★★★

FIFA-branded 4K HDR flatscreen that makes up for a lack of HDR brightness through its image clarity and solid black levels. Strong audio and a clutter-free smart platform sweeten the deal. HCC #287

13



### TCL 55DC748

→ £700 ★★★★★

While this budget UHD LCD can look bright, detailed and colour-rich, its whole-frame dimming engine and absence of motion compensation count against it. The JBL soundbar is a little underpowered. HCC #289

14



### Sony KD-55XF8505

→ £1,100 ★★★★★

This mid-tier edge-lit Sony set has its strengths, particularly its onboard audio and bright room/bright content playback. But a limited contrast means it never feels overly cinematic. HCC #287

15



### Hitachi 75HL16T64U

→ £1,350 ★★★★★

This 75in megascreen offers a lot of 4K image for not a lot of money. Predictably, picture quality can't match that of big-brand rivals – but the TV holds appeal if you're mainly after an SDR display. HCC #285



TOP 15 Speakers

01



**Bowers & Wilkins 700 Series 5.1**

→£3,800 ★★★★★

This array finds the larger models in the 700 Series proving their mettle with formidable power and precision, an expressive mid-band and detailed highs. Excellent. *HCC #285*

**Starscape** Fibre Optic Lighting  
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Photo courtesy of Gary J.Fernandez





**M&K Sound IW150 5.1** →£8,550 ★★★★★

The in-wall IW150 speakers offer the transparency and detail of a professional studio monitor in an enclosure that can vanish. This array adds driver-matched on-wall tripole surrounds and M&K's fearless X12 sub. The result is outstanding. *HCC #289*



**Wharfedale DX-2** →£450 ★★★★★

The asking price of this 5.1 system will tell you it doesn't offer the last word in surround sound fidelity, but Wharfedale's package is compact, well made and faultlessly delivers on its home-cinema-on-a-budget promise. *HCC #283*



**Monitor Audio Gold 300AV**  
→£7,150 ★★★★★

This big-ticket package excels across the frequency range, offers exquisite design and packs setup flexibility via the dipole/monopole FX surrounds. *HCC #251*



**KEF Q Series 5.1.2**  
→£3,300 ★★★★★

KEF's revamped Q Series now offers Atmos modules for an up-to-the-minute sonic experience. Big, bold-looking speakers. Robust, immersive audio. *HCC #280*



**ATC HTS7 5.1**  
→£3,500 ★★★★★

Brit brand ATC rejigs the driver tech and neutral sound of its SCM range into a wall-mountable, flexible system perfect for discreet AV setups. *HCC #275*



**Q Acoustics 3050i**  
→£1,350 ★★★★★

This update on the previous 3000 series makes subtle performance and styling improvements. The result is an excellent, well-priced, stylish package. *HCC #287*



**Monitor Audio Silver 500 5.1**  
→£3,650 ★★★★★

The new Silver range offers a potent EQ-able sub, sweet design, dipole surrounds and largescale, nuanced sonics. Atmos upfiring models would be nice, though. *HCC #282*



**Acoustic Energy 100 Series 5.1** →£1,300 ★★★★★

Acoustic Energy's latest addition scores well on style, ease of install and price, and puts in a consistently entertaining multichannel performance. *HCC #286*



**Wharfedale Diamond 11 HCP** →£800 ★★★★★

Bookshelf speakers and 10in sub combine in a system that offers mid-range and treble finesse and a healthy dollop of boisterous bass. Fun and affordable. *HCC #279*



**Q Acoustics 7000i 5.1 Slim**  
→£1,000 ★★★★★

Consistent tonality and detail retrieval are the standout elements here, joined by a cute, easy-to-accommodate design – particularly the 7060S sub. *HCC #284*



**Focal Sib Evo Dolby Atmos 5.1.2** →£1,200 ★★★★★

Enjoyable-sounding and well-priced sub/sat system with Atmos upfiring in front L/R enclosures. Not the smallest 'satellite' speakers around. *HCC #276*



**Jamo S Series 5.1.2**  
→£1,120 ★★★★★

An affordable package with drop-dead gorgeous styling, neat Atmos module integration and involving sonics – but the 8in sub isn't a beast. *HCC #290*



**DALI Opticon 5.1**  
→£3,200 ★★★★★

The Opticons employ driver designs from DALI's high-end models, and showcase a talent for involving music presentation and thrilling home cinema. *HCC #260*



**Polk Signature Series 5.1**  
→£1,450 ★★★★★

Largescale performance from a well-priced floorstanding system with slimmed-down centre enclosure. Upfront and boisterous sound; a great entertainer. *HCC #273*

## TOP 10 Projectors

**Sony VPL-VW760ES** → £15,000 ★★★★★

This premium beamer adds laser illumination to Sony's 4K SXRD projection technology, and the results are staggering. It's not super-bright, but images are detailed, vivid and supremely well-balanced. Worthy of flagship status. HCC #283

**JVC DLA-X5900** → £4,000 ★★★★★

An outstanding performer at this price point. JVC's latest D-ILA model may lack native 4K silicon but its eShift 4K engine shows real improvement and HDR playback has been greatly boosted too. A compelling home cinema PJ. HCC #282

**Optoma UHD51**  
→ £1,500 ★★★★★

This affordable 4K DLP model adds 3D playback (at 1080p) to its home cinema repertoire, making it an obvious upgrade for stereoscopy fans. Sharp, colour-rich and dynamic visuals. HCC #287

**Sony VPL-VW360ES**  
→ £7,000 ★★★★★

In Sony's 4K range between the laser-based VW760ES and entry-level 260ES you'll find this accomplished beamer. Excellent imagery with both SDR and HDR. Motorised controls. HCC #284

**Vivitek HK2288**  
→ £2,500 ★★★★★

The Taiwanese brand returns to the UK with a 4K DLP PJ that balances impressive HDR brightness with stable images. Excellent remote control and decent zoom and throw options. HCC #285

**BenQ TK800**  
→ £1,200 ★★★★★

A lot of enjoyable performance crammed into a compact package. Offers 4K HDR playback, plus 3D, with only a limited black level and occasionally pushed colours counting against. HCC #288

**Optoma UHZ65**  
→ £5,000 ★★★★★

The asking price here reflects Optoma's addition of laser illumination (yielding improved contrast and far greater 'lamp' life) to the DLP 4K and HDR playback talents of its stablemates. HCC #282

**Acer VL7860**  
→ £3,500 ★★★★★

Laser 4K DLP projector that misses out on the contrast performance of some models, but undercuts them in terms of pricing. Use the Silent mode for whisper-quiet operation. HCC #284

**Acer V6820i**  
→ £1,500 ★★★★★

Single-chip 4K DLP beamer with support for Alexa voice control (Alexa device required). While this doesn't prove particularly impressive, the PJ's dark-room image quality is decent and the styling superb. HCC #290

**BenQ W1050**  
→ £500 ★★★★★

There are a few cut corners on this budget DLP 1080p model (no backlight on the remote, no lens shift, a meagre zoom), but overall movie performance is good for the money. HCC #283

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# TOP 10 Blu-rays

01



## Oppo UDP-203 → £650 ★★★★★

Oppo debuted 4K with a superb universal design including Dolby Vision HDR. Packed with user adjustments and connectivity. No apps or Darbee processing, and the brand has now withdrawn from the BD market. HCC #269

02



## Oppo UDP-205 → £1,400 ★★★★★

This pricey, peerless UHD deck flaunts universal disc playback, asynchronous USB input, headphone amp and balanced stereo outs amongst its audiophile features. One for musos, and you may struggle to find it for sale now. HCC #274

03



## Sony UBP-X800 → £270 ★★★★★

Sony embraces UHD Blu-ray with a full-width, sturdy design that'll also spin DVD-A and SACD platters. A great all-rounder, but no current Dolby Vision support or word on an update. HCC #274

04



## Panasonic DMP-UB900 → £370 ★★★★★

The Ultra HD Blu-ray format got an inspiring debut in Panasonic's multi-talented deck that offers a sterling picture performance, 4K-enabled VOD apps and analogue audio outs. No DV. HCC #259

05



## Sony UBP-X700 → £250 ★★★★★

A compact player promised a DV update this Summer, the UBP-X700 has a nondescript design, no analogue outs and a stubby remote. But it plays great, and offers SACD support. HCC #284

06



## Cambridge Audio CXUHD → £800 ★★★★★

The lack of analogue outputs is a surprise considering CA's heritage, but this universal (and DV-capable) deck sounds sweet over its digital outs. As with Oppo's UDP-203, a MediaTek SoC is used. HCC #279

07



## Panasonic DMP-UB700 → £300 ★★★★★

Shorn of some of the audiophile niceties of the UB900 (including multichannel analogue outputs), but still a safe pair of hands with your 4K BDs. And at a bargain price. HCC #270

08



## Panasonic DMP-UB300 → £130 ★★★★★

Great 4K imagery from this bargain deck, but you might prefer to up your budget for the UB700 – no split HDMI, optical/coaxial or Wi-Fi connections here. Half-size design for an easy install. HCC #272

09



## Samsung UBD-K8500 → £180 ★★★★★

Debut Ultra HD Blu-ray player that finds fans courtesy of its sensible price point (now even lower), connected smarts and eye-catching visuals. Build quality is a little uninspiring. HCC #260

10



## Samsung UBD-M9500 → £230 ★★★★★

Second-gen 4K player that adds features (mobile BD streaming, 360-degree image support) but removes 3D playback capability. As before, the chassis is curved. UHD discs look pin-sharp. HCC #275

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Photo courtesy of Gary J.Fernandez

## TOP 10 AV Receivers/AV Processors

01



### Denon AVR-X6400H → £2,100 ★★★★★

This receiver's 11 channels of power are joined by Atmos, DTS:X and integrated Auro-3D, plus HEOS multiroom integration, making it peerlessly flexible. Sound delivery is quick-footed and articulate. A superb one-box solution. *HCC #280*

02



### Arcam AVR850 → £4,500 ★★★★★

High-end seven-channel AVR marrying Class G amplification and Atmos support with talented Dirac Live Room EQ for an excellent performance. Lacks a few feature frills, but 11-channel pre-outs allow full-fat setups. *HCC #257*

03



### Denon AVC-X8500H

→ £3,300 ★★★★★

For those who want to go even bigger with their Atmos/DTS:X system, this flagship provides 13 channels of power. Setup can be complex, and there's no FM tuner, but otherwise this is first-class. *HCC #285*

04



### Trinnov Altitude16

→ £13,000 ★★★★★

High-end 16-channel processor dazzles with its Optimizer room/speaker calibration tech. Balanced outputs for compatible amplifiers. Reference-grade sound quality. *HCC #287*

05



### Marantz NR1608

→ £600 ★★★★★

With a smoother sound signature than before and the addition of HEOS multiroom, Marantz's 7.1-channel slim-line AVR flies the flag for living-room friendly AV. Only one HDMI out, though. *HCC #278*

06



### Marantz AV8805

→ £3,600 ★★★★★

The most affordable 13-channel processor around, the AV8805 combines lean looks, setup flexibility and a musical, detailed sound performance. Uses Audyssey MultEQ XT32 calibration. *HCC #288*

07



### Sony STR-DN1080

→ £550 ★★★★★

Sony is back in the AVR game with a first Atmos model that adds worthy phantom rear speaker processing to its 5.1.2 sonics. A few UI niggles don't take much of the shine off an impressive budget buy. *HCC #277*

08



### NAD T 777 V3

→ £2,500 ★★★★★

Dirac-enabled seven-channel AV receiver (with 11-channel processing). Powerful, even-handed sonics and wonderfully easy to use, but a firmware update is still awaited for DTS:X decoding. *HCC #285*

09



### Yamaha RX-A3070

→ £1,600 ★★★★★

Currently Yamaha's most potent receiver, this nine-channel model is packed with features and performs solidly, but a GUI/remote control upgrade would be welcome. *HCC #286*

10



### Denon HEOS AVR

→ £800 ★★★★★

Able to run wireless rears/sub (using HEOS models) and sporting a display-free design, this is a five-channel AVR with a different approach. One for HEOS devotees only. *HCC #276*

## TOP 5 Bonus features



### Xploring Xtro

Possibly the best thing about Second Sight's Blu-ray for the bonkers, low-budget, cult UK sci-fi *Xtro* is this hilarious and candid hour-long *Making of...* doc. Essential post-movie viewing. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



### Verhoeven Versus Verhoeven

A detailed documentary from 2016 celebrating the filmmaker's lengthy and controversial career – you'll find it on Eureka's recent *Flesh + Blood* Blu-ray release. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



### Ghost Stories: Directors' Commentary

Directing/writing duo Andy Nyman and Jeremy Dyson provide a superb chat track for their spooky anthology flick, highlighting the movie's countless Easter Eggs. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



### The Director and the Jedi

This 95-minute *Making of...* documentary is the must-see extra on *The Last Jedi*'s BD. More than just a typical overview of the film's production, this is skilfully edited and utterly absorbing. *HCC #285*

★★★★★



### You Must Remember This: The Warner Bros. Story

The 480i image isn't great, but this 289-minute film charting WB's rise to the top of Hollywood is a brilliant addition to the *Casablanca: Premium Collection* BD. *HCC #284*

★★★★★



# TOP 10 Subwoofers



## 01 SVS SB-2000 → £800 ★★★★★

This follow up to the SB-1000 offers immense value for money. A mid-sized woofer that imbues Blu-rays with quick, taut and potent LFE, it's a perfect introduction to what a truly good sub can accomplish. *HCC #233*



## 02 REL No.25 → £6,500 ★★★★★

REL celebrates its 25th anniversary in style with this 15in/1,000W premium concoction that exhibits exhilarating speed and nuance down to serious depths. Big, but beautiful. *HCC #271*



## 03 Bowers & Wilkins DB1D → £3,750 ★★★★★

This sequel to the DB1 moves EQ to an app and changes driver/amp design. Beautifully controlled performance with depth and detail. Gorgeous bodywork. *HCC #277*



## 04 JL Audio Fathom f212v2 → £6,500 ★★★★★

A second outing for JL's 2 x 12in monster, with an increase in power (3,600W) and room EQ improvements among the changes. Sounds as good as you'd imagine. *HCC #261*



## 05 SVS SB16-Ultra → £2,500 ★★★★★

A 16in driver and 1,500W amp combine to give SVS's flagship sealed sub real appeal. Goes low but remains tight and fast. App-assisted EQ and operation. *HCC #270*



## 06 REL HT/1205 → £700 ★★★★★

A larger (12in) driver and punchier amp than on the HT/1003 increases LFE enjoyment – but still at a bargain price. Lacks a bit of subtlety though. *HCC #290*



## 07 REL HT/1003 → £500 ★★★★★

REL targets film fans with a 10in sub that drops its usual simultaneous high/low-level input to hit a new price point. Power and speed are its strengths. *HCC #286*



## 08 SVS SB-4000 → £1,800 ★★★★★

Similar in operation and styling to the SB16-Ultra flagship, but smaller and more affordable. Superior DSP results in a real sense of control. *HCC #284*



## 09 GoldenEar SuperSub X → £1,450 ★★★★★

Four drivers squeezed into a relatively compact design and given plenty of push from a 1,400W amp. Standout traits are impact and depth. *HCC #272*



## 10 KEF Kube10b → £600 ★★★★★

The middle option of KEF's new Kube range packs a 10in driver, 300W Class D amp and 56-bit DSP engine to maintain efficient low-frequency control. *HCC #283*

# TOP 5 Console games



## God of War

An HDR showcase for both PS4 and PS4 Pro (and playable in upscaled 4K on the latter), this action/puzzler is massive in scope and, in the Leviathan Axe, features perhaps the best weapon in gaming! *HCC #286*

★★★★★



## F1 2018

HDR grading adds visual allure to Codemasters' latest racing sim, while various tweaks to the career mode loosen the straitjacket approach of previous years and make it easier for novices. Hooray! *HCC #290*

★★★★★



## Monster Hunter: World

This series breaks out of its Nintendo origins to offer PS4/Xbox One owners varied, open-world gameplay, plus HDR and better-than-HD visuals that can be tailored to your desire. Monstrous fun. *HCC #283*

★★★★★



## Jurassic World: Evolution

Wanna run your own dinosaur-filled theme park? This addictive and time-stealing movie tie-in lets you do just that. Challenging final levels make up for a lack of variety. Excellent 4K visuals on next-gen consoles. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



## Far Cry 5

A cautious update on its predecessor, but there's still plenty of fun gameplay to be had in this open-world first-person shooter. Plays in native 4K HDR on Xbox One X, and better-than-HD on PS4 Pro. *HCC #285*

★★★★★

# TOP 10 Accessories



## 01 KEF R50 → £600 ★★★★★

KEF's Dolby Atmos-enabled reflective modules are a smart choice to beef up a system. Using the company's Uni-Q point source drivers pays dividends, enabling full-range sonics that reach deep into your cinema room. First-rate build. *HCC #252*



03



## Amazon Echo Dot

→ £50 ★★★★★

Less impressive as a standalone speaker than its larger sibling, but more affordable. Use its 3.5mm output and Bluetooth to pair with third-party kit. Fun AI experience. A real bargain. *HCC #269*

04



## Nvidia Shield Android TV

→ £180 ★★★★★

The Android-based streamer/gaming box gets a gentle revamp – same silicon, neater design, new features including future support for Google Assistant. Slick and easy to use. *HCC #272*

05



## Roku Streaming Stick+

→ £70 ★★★★★

If a simple life is your aim, this content-rich, 4K/HDR-capable dongle from the streaming specialist is your friend. Idiot-proof interface and control. Good price. *HCC #282*

06



## Amazon Fire TV (2017)

→ £70 ★★★★★

HDR playback has been added to Amazon's great-value media streamer, although the absence of an Ethernet port does niggle considering its 4K talents. Cluttered UI. *HCC #280*



## Panasonic SC-GA10

→ £230 ★★★★★

Panasonic partners with Google Assistant for its debut smart speaker, and doesn't forget to focus on sonic power as well as AI fun. Pricier than many rivals, but still appealing. *HCC #284*



## Apple TV 4K

→ £180 (32GB) ★★★★★

With Apple's iTunes movie store offering 4K HDR (Dolby Vision) movies at the same price as Full HD downloads, this compact media player (irritating handset aside) is sure to tempt. *HCC #284*



## PSB Imagine XA

→ £350 ★★★★★

These two-way Dolby Atmos-enabled upfiring speakers are fairly chunky, but work well at creating a height layer and the £350-per-pair ticket makes them an enticing option. *HCC #264*



## Systemline S7 Netlink Music Player

→ £700 ★★★★★

Stereo streamer with integrated services including BBC Radio at better-than-usual quality. Installation flexibility makes up for the prosaic design. *HCC #290*

# TOP 5 Blu-ray/DVD boxsets



## Predator: 3-Movie Collection [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Two great movies and one average one reborn in 4K, with existing extras and audio mixes ported from previous BDs. *Predator* now benefits from a DNR-free approach. *HCC #290*

★★★★★



## Woodfall: A Revolution in British Cinema

Bolstered by a host of archival featurettes and documentaries, this BD set gathers eight movies from the game-changing British studio, including 1963 Oscar-winner *Tom Jones*. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



## Mission: Impossible 1-5 [Ultra HD Blu-ray]

Tom Cruise risks life and limb over two decades of stunt-filled fun. Image quality varies across the five Dolby Vision/HDR10 encodes, with 2011's *Ghost Protocol* faring best. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



## The Complete Sartana

Five over-the-top Spaghetti Western flicks from the 1960s/'70s may find a new audience via this solid Blu-ray boxset from Arrow Video. Three audio commentaries are among the extras. *HCC #289*

★★★★★



## Samuel Fuller at Columbia, 1937-1961

A second Columbia Pictures set from Indicator, packing seven flicks from the crime reporter-turned filmmaker. Impressive picture quality and decent extras. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



## TOP 10 Soundbars & Soundbases



**NEW ENTRY**

### 01 Samsung HW-N950 → £1,500 ★★★★★

The latest and greatest soundbar system to arrive from Samsung's US-based Audio Lab, the HDMI-equipped N950 crafts a dynamic, detailed and immersive 7.1.4 Atmos/DTS:X soundfield without cluttering your room. *HCC #290*



### 02 Canton DM55 → £240 ★★★★★

Canton's smallest soundbase still delivers big sonic thrills. Twin woofers underpin clean and crisp mids and highs, and build quality is first-rate. Doddle to use. Bluetooth built-in. *HCC #260*



### 03 Yamaha YSP-5600SW

→ £1,900 ★★★★★

With its 46 drivers (including upfiring) this premium 'bar delivers precisely steered and immersive audio, even of the Atmos variety. Potent wireless sub and 4K-capable HDMI switching sweeten the high-end deal. *HCC #254*



### 04 Denon HEOS Bar

→ £570 ★★★★★

Multiroom-ready and app-controllable, this premium single-enclosure model offers powerful, detailed and warm sonics in spades. Can be expanded into a 5.1 system with extra HEOS hardware. *HCC #287*



### 05 Q Acoustics M3

→ £300 ★★★★★

A 4in x 6in woofer is tucked away in the M3's eye-catching angular chassis, ensuring this well-priced soundbar has a full-range performance. Simple to use. Bluetooth streaming. *HCC #271*



### 06 LG SK10Y

→ £1,200 ★★★★★

High-price but high-performance, LG's Atmos-enabled soundbar system is large in scale, rich in bass and offers 4K HDMI switching. Over 1.4m wide, so won't suit all setups. *HCC #288*



### 07 Sony HT-ZF9

→ £650 ★★★★★

This 3.1-channel soundbar handles Dolby Atmos streams and promises enveloping sonics via DSP trickery. The result isn't noticeable overhead audio, but a wide, high and exciting performance. *HCC #289*



### 08 JBL Bar Studio

→ £150 ★★★★★

No subwoofer here, just a fairly compact stereo 'bar that offers a useful soundstage-widening 'Surround' mode, HDMI ARC connectivity, and a decent performance for the price. *HCC #284*



### 09 Polk Audio MagniFi MAX SR

→ £600 ★★★★★

5.1 system using mains-powered surround speakers. Better EQ would help define its performance, but this does detail and articulation well. *HCC #289*



### 10 Q Acoustics M2

→ £300 ★★★★★

Easily accommodated in/on AV furniture, and packing HDMI ARC for a simple hookup, this BMR-driver/built-in woofer soundbase impresses with its energetic delivery and price. *HCC #279*

## TOP 5 Back-catalogue Blu-rays



### Black Book

Paul Verhoeven's Dutch language WW2 thriller is outed by 101 Films on its new 'Black Label' imprint. Image quality is improved over previous releases, and the film is joined by exclusive new extras. *HCC #290*

★★★★★



### Saving Private Ryan: Commemorative 20th Anniversary [UHD Blu-ray]

Excellent use of HDR, an uptick in detail and a new Dolby Atmos mix make this WW2 drama hard to ignore on 4K BD. No new extras, though. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



### The Changeling: Limited Ed.

Peter Medak's 1980 ghost story has acquired a cult following, meaning this belated UK BD will be welcomed. Restored visuals, DTS-HD MA audio and extras including a 40-page booklet boost its appeal. *HCC #290*

★★★★★



### The Matrix [UHD Blu-ray]

The iconic sci-fi/actioner is richly treated by Warner's new 4K outing. Dolby Atmos audio has fun with the wraparound sound design; Dolby Vision HDR and nuanced colour grading ensure it looks gorgeous. *HCC #288*

★★★★★



### Sex, Lies and Videotape

Steven Soderbergh's award-winning 1989 drama gets lush treatment from Criterion Collection, including rock-solid visuals courtesy of a 4K scan from the original 35mm negative. *HCC #290*

★★★★★





# Early Bird

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## TOP 5 PVRs



### Virgin Media TiVo, £subscription

This triple-tuner PVR offers recording flexibility, useful features – you can undelete deleted shows! – and smart TiVo functionality. If you're in a cable area, consider it

★★★★★



### Sky Q, £subscription

Sky's new top-tier product offering dazzles with its image-rich user interface, wireless multiroom skills and recording flexibility delivered by the PVR's 12 tuners. Now supports 4K content

★★★★★



### Humax FVP-5000T

Revamped menus, faster operation and tweaks to its triple-tuner engine make this the most advanced Freeview Play PVR around – and it doubles admirably as a DLNA player/media jukebox. 500GB/1TB/2TB

★★★★★



### Humax DTR-T4000, £subscription

This YouView-based PVR is required to get BT Sport's new Ultra HD channel – available to those with BT fast fibre and a BT TV sub. Easy to use and with 1TB of storage

★★★★★



### EE TV Smart Box £subscription

This quad-tuner 1TB PVR, from the mobile/broadband corp, offers innovative Replay 24-hour channel recording and great Smart device streaming. Needs more catch-up though

★★★★★

## TOP 5 Headphones



### Sony MDR-HW700DS, £800

Comfy cans supplied with an HDMI surround processor, enabling multichannel audio to be fed to a virtual 9.1-channel soundstage. The effect is superb – great for late-night listening

★★★★★



### Nuraphones, £350

Unusual over-ear/in-ear hybrid cans that measure the acoustic response of your inner ear to fine-tune performance. It's a highly impressive trick, but the design can make these a bit uncomfortable to wear.

★★★★★



### 1More MK802, £150

Ignore the bling-tastic blue or red finishes and focus on the assured sound performance from these well-priced closed-back cans. Features include wireless Bluetooth and app control (with burn-in mode). Great value

★★★★★



### Bowers & Wilkins PX, £330

B&W adds noise-cancelling to the general spec of its previous P7 wireless cans, a welcome update for those seeking uninterrupted listening. Offers a neutral, balanced sound suited to both movies and music

★★★★★



### Audio Technica ATH-SR9, £400

45mm drivers and Audio Technica's Midpoint Mount tech deliver wide, deep, spacious sonics. Memory foam padding aids listener comfort; 3m cable should suit most AV setups

★★★★★

## TOP 5 Wireless speakers



### KEF Muo, £300

Portable Bluetooth speaker that's a cut above much of the competition. KEF's sonic knowhow results in a punchy, dynamic presentation that cherishes lossless rips. Excellent build quality

★★★★★



### Sony SRS-X11, £60

An affordable palm-sized Bluetooth speaker with internal rechargeable battery, Sony's SRS-X11 is supremely portable and sounds decent for the money. A neat little gizmo. Get two and they can work in stereo

★★★★★



### Dynaudio Music 7, £875

Top-of-the-range multiroom option from Dynaudio, this sizable speaker creates a full-range, detailed soundstage. Music App offers useful adjustments and EQ modes. Inputs include HDMI (ARC)

★★★★★



### AirPulse Audio A200, £800

Monitor-style active speakers offering physical and wireless hookups, a premium build and a sweet yet weighty sound delivered by ribbon tweeters and 5.5in midbass drivers

★★★★★



### Denon HEOS 5 HS2, £350

The mid-range multiroom speaker gets a second-gen revamp, adding welcome hi-res audio playback and Bluetooth connectivity. Gorgeous looks, boisterous, room-filling sound

★★★★★

# HOME CINEMA

Choice

## → IN THE NEXT ISSUE

**The world's best cinema rooms** We gawp and drool at this year's CEDIA Award winners  
**More than jump scares** *The Haunting of Hill House* sound designer Trevor Gates talks terrifying audio  
**8K TV** What you need to know!

## → REVIEWS

**Yamaha CX-A5200** 11-channel processor  
**Pioneer VSX-933** AV receiver **Klipsch Atmos** system  
**Sony AF9** OLED TV **Monitor Audio** Monitor 5.1  
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#292 ON SALE  
Nov 1

CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE – BUT ONLY FOR THE BETTER



# AV Avenger

Old is the new new, reasons **Steve May**, as he takes a flight of fancy with the master of stop-motion animation (no, not Nick Park)

**I RECENTLY WENT** to the cinema to see a Ray Harryhausen movie.

Given that his last film was *Clash of the Titans*, in 1981, this clearly wasn't any old movie trip (and no, I hadn't stumbled across Rod Taylor's time machine). Instead it was a rare opportunity to see his earlier flick *First Men in the Moon* remastered in 4K – a release on UHD disc is unlikely anytime soon, so a freshly minted cinema DCP was clearly too good to miss.

*First Men...* was Harryhausen's only anamorphic CinemaScope release and this new version positively glowed. Looking better now than it did when first released in 1964, free from scratches and blemish, it boasted a wonderful clarity that showcased its early visual effects.

Elements of the film itself still seem impressively prescient (given that it predates the first Apollo flight by a good two years), but for the most part it's a bonkers yarn fuelled as much by Lionel Jeffries' manic performance as the gravity defying Cavorite that propels him into space.

The screening took place in London's Regent Street Cinema, an auditorium that dates back to the 1800s and is itself lovingly refurbished. A more fitting venue for HG Wells' fantasy is difficult to imagine.

**There's something thrilling about watching a vintage movie in a modern theatre, a joyous mixture of nostalgia and spectacle.** Some members of the audience actually became quite emotional, having never had a chance to see *First Men...* presented theatrically before.

The event celebrated the launch of *Harryhausen The Movie Posters*, a coffee-table tome authored by Richard Holliss (sometimes of this parish). The book features a fascinating selection of international

versions of iconic posters, certain to delight both Harryhausen devotees and lovers of movie art.

There's a growing interest in seeing cinema classics on the biggest of screens, of course. Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* notably enjoyed a theatrical reissue earlier this year to celebrate its 50th anniversary. A new unrestored 70mm print – an analogue photochemical film recreation struck from the original camera negative – premiered at Cannes, before getting a limited theatrical run. There were also IMAX 70mm, IMAX with Laser and IMAX Xenon presentations.

## A chance to enhance?

Speaking of IMAX, even as *First Men in the Moon* played out, IMAX was announcing its IMAX Enhanced marketing wheeze. A collaboration with DTS, IMAX Enhanced is a licensing and certification program for TVs, soundbars and AV receivers.

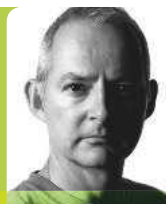
We're told that IMAX Enhanced kit will be required to meet a high set of audio and video performance markers, as decided by a committee of IMAX and DTS engineers, and content creators. This all boils down to an IMAX Enhanced playback mode.

Should you care? Probably not. IMAX and DTS have merely leapt into the void left by THX, which has seemingly wilted away in the face of UHD. Denon, Sony and Marantz are all early launch partners, and there will even be IMAX Enhanced software, apparently mastered using a proprietary post-production process.

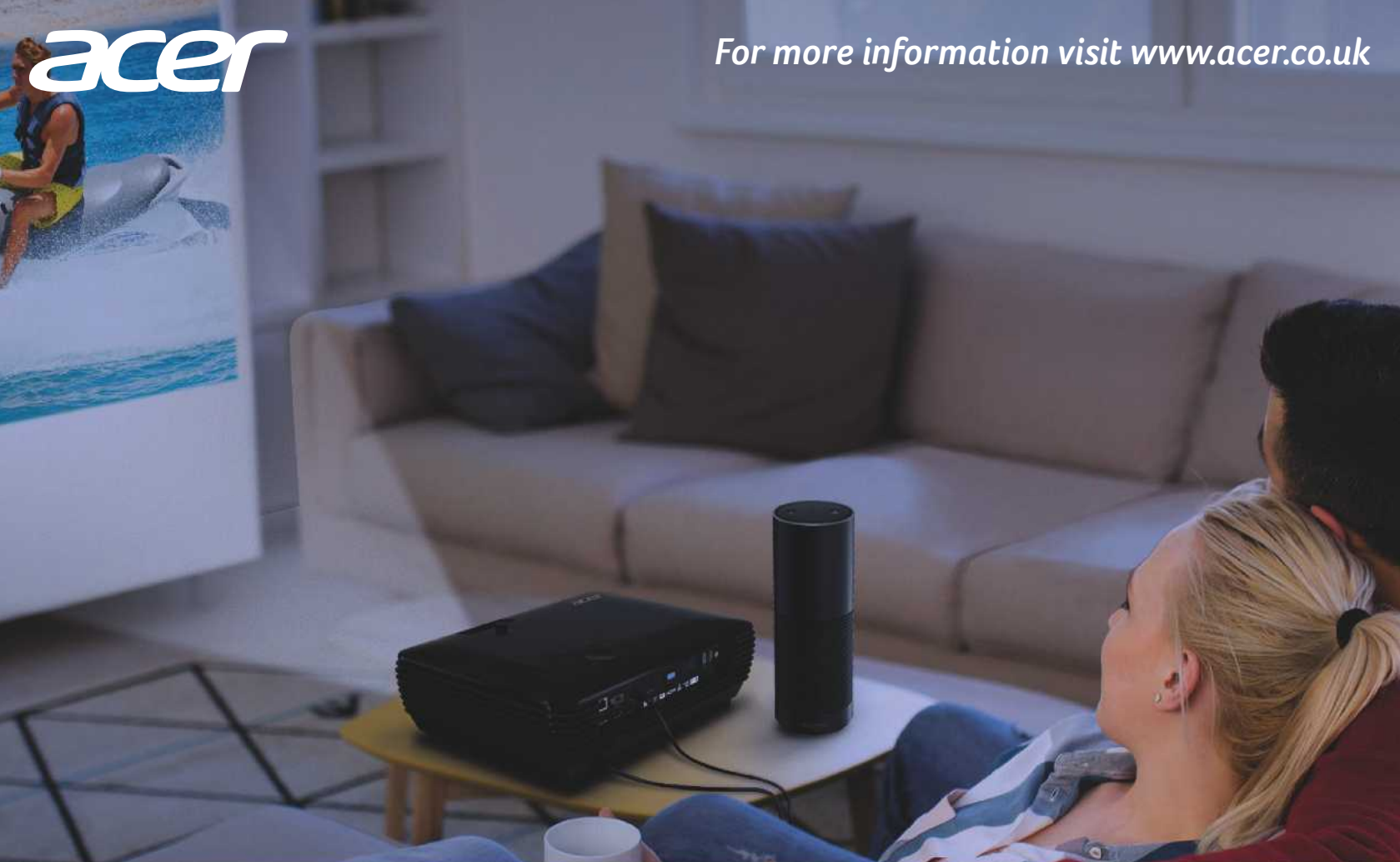
I reckon *2001: A Space Odyssey* could well make the cut, but *First Men in the Moon* probably won't. Somehow I don't think this loss will make Harryhausen's Selenites any less magical ■

*Do you seek out screenings of vintage movies?  
Let us know: email letters@homecinemachoice.com*

**Steve May's**  
own stop-motion  
puppet walks  
slowly, can't talk  
properly and falls  
over regularly. Much  
like Steve after 10  
minutes in the pub

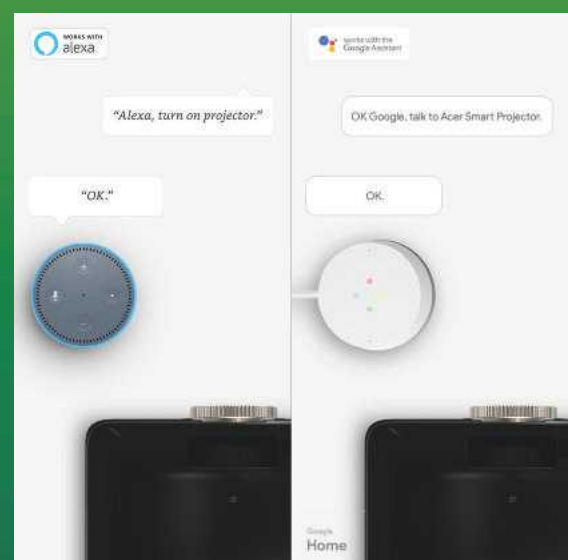






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